LIVING IN HIS IMAGE • BOOK THREE

BEIN ADAM LAMAKOM

Mitzvos Between Man and Hashem: Sacred Connection, Belief, and Sanctuary

ENCOMPASSING SEDER 6 (MOADIM) • SEDER 7 (EDUS) • SEDER 8 (TOROS) • SEDER 9 (AVODAH)

LIVING IN HIS IMAGE

BOOK THREE • BEIN ADAM LAMAKOM

Living in His Image • The Chavrusa Edition
A Comprehensive Curriculum of Halachah, Hashkafah, and Character Refinement

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PRIMARY RABBINIC SOURCES & HALACHIC FOUNDATIONS

Primary halachic rulings and moral dilemma analyses drawn from the works of *Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein shlit"a* (including *Chashukei Chemed*, *Veharev Na*, and *Shiurei Torah L'Rof'im*), alongside the classical commentators: the *Rambam*, *Ramban*, *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Mishnah Berurah*, and the *Sfas Emes*.

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MISSION STATEMENT & CURRICULUM GUIDE

MISSION STATEMENT

This Sefer has five goals. They are:

I. A COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM OF ALL HALACHAH AND HASHKAFAH

To create a comprehensive curriculum for teachers and mentors that teaches both the philosophy and practice of all of Judaism through the prism of all the mitzvos, both d'Oraisa and d'Rabbanan, that are practiced today

II. HOW EACH MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER TO RESEMBLE AND DRAW CLOSE TO HASHEM

To demonstrate how the goal of all of the mitzvos is to help us perfect our character so that we become similar and close to Hashem. This sefer studies each mitzvah and teaches how it helps to either perfect our character or inspires us to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem.

III. THE HALACHOS AND HASHKAFAH OF EACH MITZVAH

To briefly teach the basic halachos of each mitzvah and the philosophy that is taught by each mitzvah

IV. THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE MITZVOS

Chazal teach that each mitzvah is connected to all of the rest. (Taryag mitzvos hateluim bo). This sefer demonstrates the interrelation between each mitzvah, and how they are unified towards the goal of perfecting our character and perfecting the world in order to resemble and come close to Hashem. This teaches that the mitzvos are not disjointed, but all work together synergistically to achieve the goals of the Torah.

V. THE SYSTEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE MITZVAH SYSTEM

To teach the systematic structure and categories of the mitzvah system. This teaches that the Torah is an organized and systematic system.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This book is primarily made for mentors who are studying with someone who is growing in their observance, or as a resource for teachers to teach this course.

WHAT IS THIS CURRICULUM?

Many of us know that the purpose of the mitzvos is to bring us closer to Hashem, but it is not clear how each mitzvah help us achieve that. There often seems to be a disconnect between what we know is the goal of the mitzvah system, and the mitzvos themselves. In addition, Mitzvos are often perceived as disjointed, unrelated to each other, and not part of a cohesive whole. Each of the mitzvos, as well any specific point of Jewish philosophy are often mistakenly seen as part of a jumble of disparate and separate items, and don't relate to each other in an organized system with a single defined purpose.

This curriculum, based on the works of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, attempts to demonstrate how the goals of the mitzvah system are connected to the mitzvos themselves. It demonstrates how every mitzvah is part of an integrated system to perfect our middos (character) to make us similar and consequently close to Hashem. It shows how every single mitzvah, even the mitzvos that are bein adam lemakom, have their purpose in helping us achieve shleimus, or character perfection.

The program uses the classic works of the Sefer Hamitzvos of the Chofetz Chaim and the Sefer Chareidim as its primary texts. The mitzvos are taught using Rav S.R. Hirsch's structure as he has outlined in his books The Nineteen Letters, and Chorev. This structure beautifully illustrates how all of the Mitzvos lead toward the single goal of shleimus, which is to resemble Hashem's perfection.

There are five goals of this Halachah and Hashkafah program:

1. To create a comprehensive curriculum for teachers and mentors that teaches both the philosophy and practice of Judaism through the prism of all the mitzvos, both d'Oraisa and d'Rabbanan, that are practiced today

2. To demonstrate the interrelation between each mitzvah, and how they are unified towards the goal of perfecting our character to resemble Hashem and to perfect the world

3. To teach the systematic structure the mitzvah system

4. To briefly teach the basic halachos of each mitzvah and the philosophy that is taught by each mitzvah

5. To study each mitzvah and teach how it helps to either perfect our character or inspire us to perfect our character

This curriculum is also attempting to fill a current void. Many people who begin learning with someone who is looking to learn more about Judaism are faced with the dilemma of what to learn. Some begin to learn Jewish philosophy, like Derech Hashem or Strive for Truth. But as they progress, they feel that while they are teaching fundamental ideas of Jewish thought, they aren't presenting any concrete Yiddishkeit. It seems abstract, theoretical, and "airy-fairy". They may begin to feel that they are not learning how to live as a Jew. On the other extreme, others begin with Halachah like Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, but for a beginner that can be dry, technical and very intimidating.

This program offers one solution to that problem by presenting the student with a wholesome balance of both Halachah and Hashkafah; to teach all of the mitzvos and their basic halachos, and use those mitzvos as a springboard to teach important principles of Hashkafah (Jewish thought)

This book is divided into several sections. The first section is entitled "All of Torah on One Foot". It is an explanation of the structure of the mitzvah system, based on the teachings of Rav Hirsch and Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto. It is the philosophical introduction and underpinning of the program.

The next section is the actual curriculum that you use to learn with. It includes a comprehensive listing of all the mitzvos, based (with slight modifications for clarification) on the structure of Rav Hirsch's Chorev.

The mitzvos are presented in the following format.

This book divides all of the mitzvos into nine categories of mitzvos, called Chesed, Mishpatim, Pekudim, Limud, Chukim, Moadim, Edus, Toros, and Avodah.

At the beginning of each mitzvah category, there is a basic overview of the purpose of the mitzvos in that category, and how it fits within the general framework of all of the mitzvos. All of the mitzvos in that category are broken down further into smaller mitzvah "clusters". Before each mitzvah cluster there is a brief overview of the mitzvos in the section, and how it helps to make us similar to Hashem.

Within each cluster, you will find each individual mitzvah. Each mitzvah is composed of up to six parts.

1. First, the scriptural source for each mitzvah is listed.

2. That is followed by a list of questions that the halachah addresses. These questions can be read to the student before you learn the halachah. It is often helpful to discuss the questions with the student before the halachah is read. These questions engage the student, and make it more interactive, interesting and memorable. They can be used to create an interactive discussion about the mitzvah before the text is studied together.

3. After the questions, you will find a quotation of the sefer Hamitzvos HaKatzar written by the Chofetz Chaim, based on the Rambam's Sefer Hamitzvos. I have chosen this text because it is a brief description of the fundamental halachos from that mitzvah. I believe it is worthwhile to study the text of a classical book, rather reading a list of selected halachos. For the mitzvos that the Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatzar does not quote, I have used the short text from the Sefer Chareidim. I have chosen to use the Sefer Chareidim as well is because the Sefer Chareidim is a comprehensive list of all of the mitzvos that the Rishonim count. It has many mitzvos d'Oraisa that the Sefer Hamitzvos leaves out. (They were left out by the Rambam because he held that they were details of other broader mitzvos, or because they were so fundamental and broad that they were the axioms of the other mitzvos) Additionally the Sefer Chareidim lists the mitzvos d'Rabbanan and mitzvos Medivrei Kaballa that are not listed by the Sefer Hamitzvos.

4. After the halachah, you will find a paragraph describing how that mitzvah works in tandem with the rest of the mitzvos to help perfect our character, to make us similar to Hashem, and therefore how it can make us close to Hashem.

5. Next you will find a listing of additional ideas, lessons, and explanations behind the mitzvah. These explanations are in addition to the central concept of the mitzvah being either an emulation of Hashem, or an inspiration to emulate Hashem.

6. Finally you will find a list of suggested Hashkafah topics that relate to the mitzvah. Rav Hirsch taught that the entire worldview and hashkafah of the Torah, can be seen through the prism of the mitzvos themselves. I therefore have added a list of suggested fundamental hashkafah topics that relate to each mitzvah. The teacher is of course

welcome and encouraged to add any hashkafah that he or she thinks is appropriate.

On the top of each page, you will find a short description of the purpose of the mitzvos in that section. This also serves to remind the student where the specific mitzvah fits within the broader framework of all of the mitzvos.

May it be Hashem's will that we all succeed in being marbitz Torah, and succeed in bringing many people closer to Him.

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

As we mentioned earlier, the goal of this curriculum is to teach the basic halachos of all the mitzvos, their philosophical ideas, and how all of the mitzvos work together to help perfect our character to make us similar to Hashem.

This program is designed to be an engaging dialogue rather than simply a unilateral and didactic lecture.

You begin with the introduction called "All of Torah on one foot". This can either be taught by having the student read it independently ahead of time, it can be read together, or the teacher can teach it in his own words. This section gives the general overview of the program.

After that is complete, you begin to learn the mitzvos. The book is divided into nine sections. Before each section there is an introduction of the mitzvos in the section. This should be read together

Next within each section, the mitzvos are clumped together in clusters. Before each mitzvah cluster, there is short a description of how these mitzvos help to make us more similar to Hashem. This should also be read together.

You are now ready to begin the individual mitzvah. Begin by reviewing where this mitzvah fits within the mitzvah chart. You can use the headings at the top of the page to review where it fits.

Next, read the description of the mitzvah and its scriptural source. You can now ask your student their opinion to some of the question that will be addressed in the Halachos of the mitzvah. These questions should lead you into an engaging discussion. Ask their opinions, and what they intuitively feel the answer should be. Next read the text of the halachos. This will either be the text of the Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatzar or the text of the Sefer Chareidim.

Then read the description of how that mitzvah helps to perfect our character to make us similar and so close to Hashem.

Next, share some of the additional reasons and insights given by the other commentaries. After you finish the reasons, you can move on to discuss the related Hashkafah topics.

After the student feels satisfied, you are ready to move on to the next mitzvah. In an average session of an hour you can usually complete 2 or 3 mitzvos.



SEDER SIX • SECTION TWO: EDIFYING MITZVOS

MOADIM: HOLY DAYS OF EDIFICATION

Mitzvos That Sanctify, Remind, and Inspire Us to Achieve Godliness

MOADIM: HOLY DAYS OF EDIFICATION

OVERVIEW

As we discussed earlier, living life constantly striving to emulate the Almighty in every situation presented to us is obviously a very lofty ideal, and it is very easy for idealism to inexorably burn itself out. Being constantly involved with the daily grind of the material world can easily make us forget our idealistic goals and aspirations. As we mentioned before, the second hurdle to G-dliness is the necessity to inspire people with a passionate sense of duty to strive toward this ideal of G-dliness. And that is the central purpose of the second half, the right half of the mitzvah system. All of these mitzvos help supply us with the passion, the drive, and the spiritual fortitude to strive to achieve the lofty goal of shleimus, of G-dliness. That is the purpose of the Mitzvos of Inspiration and Sanctification.

As we have established, the first half of the Torah are mitzvos of emulating Hashem. They can be compared to a turbo-charged Ferrari. It has a powerful engine that will take us all the way to G-d. But that Ferrari can't move anywhere without gasoline. The gasoline of the Torah comes in the form of this second half of mitzvos. All of these mitzvos give us the fuel to reach our destination.

This fuel can come to us in many different ways. The first two categories in the mitzvos of Inspiration and Sanctification are the categories called Edus and Moadim. All the mitzvos in these categories are mitzvos that teach us certain lessons, or remind us of certain events. When we fulfill one of these mitzvos, and concentrate on the idea that the mitzvah is trying to teach us, we then access an edifying spiritual influence from above, called a hashpah, which charges us with spiritual energy to be able to fulfill our goal of shleimus.

These mitzvah categories are unique. With every other category of mitzvos, the lesson of the mitzvah is not an essential part of the mitzvah. For example, a person is required simply to do chesed and it is not essential that he understands the underlying idea of chesed. A person is required to simply keep kosher and again, it is not essential that he understands the underlying idea of kashrus. However, in the categories of Edus and Moadim an essential part of the mitzvah is its underlying lesson and idea. For example, an integral part of keeping Shabbos is to understand what keeping Shabbos is expressing. A person has to understand what keeping Pesach is about to observe the mitzvah properly. The same is true with Tefillin, Tzitzis, Sukkah, Matzah, Milah, etc. With all of these mitzvos, an integral part of the mitzvah is its underlying lesson. And to the degree that we concentrate and meditate on its lesson, to that same degree will we access its edifying spiritual influence.

This leads us to the mitzvah category before us called Moadim. Western culture conceives time as linear. It maintains that time proceeds from a specific starting point in a relentless straight line with no recurrences. Other cultures, such as the ancient cultures of the Mayans and Native Americans, as well as eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism observed the recurring cyclical patters of the seasons and nature and conceived of time as a "wheel of time". They perceive time as one large circle, constantly recurring, with no beginning or end point.

The Torah's conception of time affirms that both ideas are indeed correct. Time is both linear and cyclical. It is a spiral. The Hebrew word for year is Shana. That word also means to repeat. That is because a shana, a year, is really a repetition. A year is an objective not merely conceptual cycle and many aspects of it repeat every year. However, we are not simply caught in a perpetual circle. At the same time the word shana also means to change. We are also

progressing in time. Each beginning of the year takes us one more year ahead. So we are both cycling and progressing at the same time. We are spiraling upwards in time, from the beginning point of Creation towards the world's historical destiny.

We have just described the cycle of a year. Within that large yearly cycle, there are also twelve smaller cycles of a month, and within a month there are four smaller cycles of a week. Just like with a year, the beginning of a month or the beginning of a week is the beginning of the same cycle, just one step further.

The Almighty caused certain seminal events in world history. The Kabbalists, the Jewish mystics taught that concurrent with those seminal events, the Almighty brought a "great enlightening holiness" into the world. That enlightening holiness had great spiritual power to inspire us to master our physical side and come close to the Almighty. But the enlightening holiness of that time period was not limited to that cycle alone. Every time the cycle returns again to that period of time, we enter that very same incredible spiritual energy.

Let's illustrate this mystical concept. When the Almighty freed the Bnei Yisrael from the bondage of Mitzraim, He caused a powerful spiritual influence of "freedom from the shackles of negativity" to shine in the world. But that influence was not limited to that particular era alone. Every time the yearly cycle returns to that point in time, we once again tap into that very same spiritual influence of freedom. That spiritual influence of "freedom from the shackles of negativity", even today has the power to free us from the limitations of our material nature, to free us from being slaves to our yetzer hara, in order to allow us to strive for the spiritual. We can once again access the incredible spiritual influence that was present at the time of the Exodus.

Imagine a giant spiral staircase made out of glass. Each revolution of the spiral takes a year to complete. At certain levels of the staircase, a large spotlight shoots upwards through all the thousands of levels of the staircase. Every time you reach the same place above the spotlight you are once again awash in its powerful light.

That is what a Yom Tov (Holy Day) is. At certain points in history, at certain areas and levels of the "staircase", the Almighty brought an incredibly powerful edifying influence into the world, and every time we go above the "spotlight" we are once again surrounded by its powerful light.

That light, however, needs to be absorbed by us in order to give us its spiritual boost. When we reach the time of Shabbos or a Holy Day the air is filled with powerful ambient spiritual energy. But how do we absorb it?

All of us are constantly surrounded with music. However that music is not audible to us because it is modulated into radio waves. In order to hear the music we need a radio, which has a receiver (using an antenna and demodulator) to receive the waves, and a tuner (using a capacitor and an inductor) to filter out all other frequencies. The same concept is true for all of the Holy days. At the time of Shabbos or a Yom Tov the air is filled with a tremendous amount of ambient spiritual energy. But like radio waves, we can't absorb that energy without a receiver and a tuner/filter. Certain activities on each Holy day act as receivers of that energy (such as eating matzah on Pesach), and others are filters (such as not doing melacha, creative work on Pesach). The special mitzvos of each of the Holy days allow us to absorb the special holy influence of the day. We are used to the concept of sanctuaries in space, but these are sanctuaries in time.

Shabbos is the greatest of all the Holy Days. Let's elaborate on Shabbos' lesson and its effect. The Almighty created the world in six days. After the Almighty created Man and Woman, he rested. He was done. That rest, that completion, was called Shabbos. Shabbos immediately followed the creation of humans. We know that humanity's purpose is to

use the physical world around them as tools to achieve closeness to the Almighty. But because the Almighty was invisible, it would be easy for Man to forget his purpose, and rather than use the world as a tool to serve the Almighty, use his dominance over the world for his own selfish designs. So on the seventh day, the very first day that Man was able to use the world creatively for his own selfish designs, Man was given a reminder that the world in fact belongs to the Almighty and that it is to be used as a tool to fulfill the Almighty's will. This reminder was called Shabbos. Shabbos was to accomplish this reminder by means of Man resting. Rest did not mean to take a nap. It meant that man was not to do Melacha, not to make creative improvements of the world. He was not to do work that expressed his mastery of the world. He was not to light fire, plant trees, harvest, or write, because those are all creative activities which demonstrate man's mastery over the earth. For one day, Man was to "tread lightly upon the earth", and by not utilizing his dominance over the world he was to express the idea that the world is not his world, but the Almighty's.

To illustrate, when I walk into a neighbors house I don't begin to bake bread, I don't light fires, I don't show my dominance there, because it is not my house. The same is true of our world. Once a week we are to rest from expressing our dominance over the world, and we thereby declare that we acknowledge that the Almighty is the creator and owner of the world, not us.

The result of acknowledging that this is the Almighty's world is that we acknowledge that we have to live by His rules. For example, when I walk into your house and I am aware that it is your house, I follow your rules. If you want me not to speak loudly, I will comply. If you want me to remove my muddy shoes, I will comply. If I'm in your house I will obey you because I understand that if I don't follow your rules I will have to face the consequences. You may ask me to leave, or you may not invite me back.

Similarly, on Shabbos, when we demonstrate by not doing any melacha, any creative work, that this is the Almighty's world, the logical corollary is that we are reminded that we have to live by His will. It is His "house", and we have to follow His mitzvos. So in short, our rest from creative work on Shabbos is an expression that we acknowledge that it is not us, but the Almighty, who is the creator and master of the earth, and we therefore have to live on this earth by His will.

That is the inner meaning behind our rest on Shabbos. But in addition to symbolizing the idea stated above, our rest also helps us to accomplish another powerful thing. On the day of Shabbos, the air itself is filled with ambient spiritual energy. When we rest on Shabbos, and focus on what it means, that is a "receiver" to absorb the incredible spiritual energy of Shabbos. Proper absorption of that energy charges us with renewed strength to live by the message of Shabbos and fulfill the Almighty's will throughout the rest of the week.

The same is true for all of the Holy Days. As we mentioned before, on Pesach the air is filled with great spiritual energy that can free us from the binds and limitations of our material nature, from the binds of the yetzer hara. When we fulfill the mitzvos of Pesach, such as eating Matzah and Sipur Yetzias Mitzraim, retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, they are receivers to absorb the liberating and purifying ambient energy of Pesach.

We mentioned before that Tefillin also give us an inspiration with its influence of spiritual energy. Tefillin have an incredible holiness, but the influence that they give is much less than the influence of the Holy Days. The influx of spiritual energy on a Holy Day is far greater than the influx absorbed from Tefillin. That is why we don't wear Tefillin on the Holy Days. Wearing Tefillin on such a day of holiness would be superfluous. It would be like lighting a candle in the sunlight.

Parenthetically, that is the reason why women are exempt from doing many of the symbolic mitzvos in the category of Edus. Just as men do not have to recharge themselves with Tefillin on a Holy day because it is superfluous, the Almighty decreed that women generally have an inner spiritual stability that doesn't demand that they constantly recharge themselves with many of these symbolic mitzvos.

In summary, all of the commandments in this category of mitzvos, are Holy days, which are set aside to contemplate and meditate about the fundamental ideas that are at their root. When we think about their ideas and observe the special mitzvos of the day, we access and become elevated the powerful holy ambient energy that fills the world during that period.

SHABBOS: THE FOUNDATION OF ETERNAL FAITH

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to observing Shabbos, a day that fills us with a spirit of holiness and reminds us about the purpose of our lives.

1. To Rest on Shabbos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 20

As the Torah says, but on the seventh day you shall rest (Shemos 23:12, Parshas Mishpatim).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can our animals do work on Shabbos?
- Can we tell a non-Jew to do work for us on Shabbos?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Under this positive commandment, one is likewise commanded that his domestic animals and livestock must rest from labor (shevisas behemah).

It is forbidden by rabbinic decree — termed a shevus — to instruct a non-Jew to perform creative labor on Shabbos (amirah l'akum).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Shabbos is a reminder that Hashem is the Creator of the world and that we have to therefore fulfill His mitzvos to become G-dlike. In addition, the special ambient kedushah of Shabbos gives us a spiritual recharge that renews us with strength to control our yetzer hara, and listen to our conscience (yetzer tov) in order to become more G-dlike.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 32)

Shabbos is a reminder and a testimony that Hashem created the world and rested. It teaches that the world was not created by itself.

In addition, when we rest from work we remind ourselves that we no longer work as slaves because we left Mitzraim. Shabbos is therefore also a reminder that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH — CHOREV

When we rest on Shabbos and refrain from exhibiting our mastery over the world, we express that Hashem is really the Master and Creator of the world. By not doing melacha on Shabbos we are symbolically saying that we do not express our mastery over the world because it is not our world, it is Hashem's. The reminder that Hashem is the master of the world reminds us that we therefore have to live in His world in accordance with His will.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:42)

Shabbos helps to make sure that we can devote at least 1/7 of our lives to the development of our mind and spirit by studying Torah.

IBN EZRA

Remembering the Shabbos means to spend the day of Shabbos thinking about Hashem's sovereignty, and studying Torah. Shabbos is to be similar to shemittah which was a year dedicated to learning Torah.

ABARBANEL

The cycle of the workdays and Shabbos symbolizes our life as a whole, that we will work all of our lives but will eventually reach a point where we will go to our eternal rest. This reminds us to make the most of our life, while we are still alive.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:7)

Purpose of Shabbos. Elevates all days and allows us to absorb the kedushah.

The end of each cycle, the end of the week, the end of the 6000 years will be kadosh. That is an elevation to all of the days. This is because even though the world needs most days to be chol and only a few days to be kadosh, but because of the fact that the end and culmination is kadosh, the result is that all of the days that lead up to it are sanctified and elevated.

Shabbos is a special present to Yisrael because Hashem wanted us to be a holy people. It wasn't given to any other nation because the maala that comes with Shabbos wasn't fitting for them.

The intense degree of maala that we can absorb on Shabbos, demands a hanhaga to absorb that hashpa. Being involved in the physical world pulls us down. In order to be mekabel the hashpa of Shabbos, you have to withdraw from esek in the world in order to absorb that hashpa.

It's impossible to totally withdraw from the physical because we are physical beings. Hashem decided the exact degree that we have to withdraw and the exact degree that we can remain involved with the physical. That degree is the issurei Shabbos.

SFAS EMES

• The Torah says “And the Children of Israel shall guard the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos.” How can refraining from creative labor (melachah) be called to make and rectify (la'asos)? The Sfas Emes cites the Chiddushei HaRim that every mitzvah below strengthens its spiritual root (shoresh) above. Shabbos adds a remarkable possibility: When the Jew consciously stops because Hashem commanded him to stop, the absence of physical production

itself becomes a positive spiritual act. He establishes Shabbos precisely by refusing to treat human activity as unlimited. The stillness is therefore not emptiness. It is an act of self-nullification (bittul) through which the covenant (bris) of Shabbos becomes present in the world (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Ki Sisa 5635).

• At Sinai, Klal Yisrael received crowns for saying "we will do and we will hear" (na'aseh v'nishma), and these were lost after the Chet HaEgel. Chazal teach that Moshe returns those crowns on Shabbos. The Sfas Emes explains that Shabbos remained connected to the original relationship of Sinai even after the sin. Every Shabbos therefore carries a spiritual illumination (ha'arah) from the first Luchos and from the spiritual state that preceded the Egel. This is more than remembering Matan Torah: it is a limited restoration of its original clarity (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5637).

• In a particularly important passage the Sfas Emes says explicitly that Shabbos is the foundation (yesod) of three foundational principles of faith (emunos). The first looks backward: Hashem created everything. The second concerns the present: Hashem continues to be the One Who brings into being (mehaveh), Who gives life (mechayeh), and Who guides (manhig) the world, a truth revealed especially through Torah and Hashgachah. The third looks forward: history is moving toward "Hashem is One and His Name is One" when His unity will be openly revealed. The three Shabbos tefillos correspond to these three: "You sanctified" (Atah kiddashta) to Creation, "Moshe rejoiced" (Yismach Mosheh) to Torah and Divine governance (hanhagah), and "You are One" (Atah Echad) to the future unity. Thus Shabbos teaches where the world came from, Who governs it now, and where it is going (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5649).

• Olam Hazeh is the world of becoming: a person works, chooses, struggles, repairs, and moves from stage to stage. Olam Haba is the revelation (gilui) of what all that work was preparing. Shabbos brings a small illumination of that future into every week. The person who spends six days as a spiritual progression (mahalach) is given a day of serene rest (menuchah) in which he can receive. This explains the requirement to regard one's work as though it were completed. Shabbos trains the person to understand that endless production cannot be the ultimate purpose (tachlis). Work exists so that there can ultimately be a spiritual vessel (kli) capable of receiving closeness to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Bereishis 5653).

• The Sfas Emes develops the previous idea further. "We will do" (na'aseh) belongs to action, while "we will hear and understand" (nishma) describes receptive hearing and inner attachment. He writes explicitly, "Shabbos is the aspect of Nishma (deep spiritual listening), for no physical labor is performed on it." During the six days a Jew serves through doing: mitzvos, work, struggle, and spiritual rectification (tikkun). Shabbos brings the complementary capacity to stop acting and receive. This helps explain why the crowns can return on Shabbos: the day itself belongs to the dimension of "we will hear and understand" (nishma) that remains rooted above the world of damaged action. The cessation of work creates the inner silence in which the person can again hear (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Ki Sisa 5642).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the idea of Shabbos being mein olam haba.
- We say in davening that Shabbos is "tachlis maseh shomayim varetz", The goal of the creation of heaven and earth. What does that mean?

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A chasan went to get a haircut the Shabbos before his ufruf. He was in the middle of getting the haircut and half of his hair was cut when someone in the barbershop fainted. A whole commotion started, and paramedics came, but the chasan didn't get to finish his haircut because it was too close to Shabbos. He was embarrassed to go to shul for his ufruf. Can he ask a gentile to cut the rest of his hair on Shabbos?

Answer: He may ask a non-Jew to finish the haircut. Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that in cases of extreme public embarrassment and human dignity (kavod ha'beriyos)—especially for a groom on his wedding Shabbos—halachah permits asking a gentile to perform the haircut to prevent humiliation, provided it is not shaved completely smooth to the skin.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 202

The Frankel family, who had five children, lived in a large Jewish community with all of the expected Jewish social infrastructure. One Shabbos day, Mr. Frankel went off shul. At about 10 AM his 7-year-old Dovi accidentally knocked over the hot water urn. The hot water poured on poor Dov's leg and badly scalded him. Mrs. Frankel immediately ran to care for Dovi. When she saw the burn she knew it was clearly extremely painful and it may have been a severe burn, but it did not look life-threatening. She reached for the phone to call Hatzolah, but then hesitated for a moment. Was she allowed to call Hatzolah for an emergency that was very painful but was not life-threatening? Mrs. Frankel assumed that she could but was not sure. She was about to call Hatzalah again when she envisioned more than a hundred Hatzolah members in the middle of davening, getting disturbed because of her call. If they send an ambulance maybe ten people would break Shabbos to help her poor Dovi who was in extreme pain. Maybe it would be better for her to send the rest of the kids to a neighbor and get into the car and drive Dovi to the emergency room herself. But then she thought of the 30 minutes it would take to drive to the ER. She imagined Dovi in pain all that time. In order to get treatment much quicker and for Dovi to be in less pain, perhaps it would be better to call Hatzolah who might be able to treat Dovi on the spot, or at least drive him to the ER quicker. Perhaps if he is driven in by an ambulance he would have a shorter time in the ER for treatment. Mrs. Frankel just wasn't sure. What do you think? In a case where a child is in pain, but likely not in danger of death, was she allowed to break Shabbos to drive to the ER? Even if she could, would it be better for her to drive herself which would minimize the breaking of Shabbos but would take more time, or to call Hatzalah which would disturb more than 100 people on Shabbos, but would take less time?

Answer: Regarding the question about the boy who got a burn on his leg on Shabbos, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered that the mother should call hatzola, or call a doctor, and follow exactly what they advise them to do.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive

A teenage boy sustained a deep laceration on Shabbos that requires immediate suturing to stop bleeding and prevent infection. A neighboring physician is equipped to suture the wound immediately at home, but lacks local anesthetic, meaning the procedure will cause significant pain. Alternatively, driving the boy to the hospital emergency room will provide anesthesia and painless treatment, but will entail extensive desecration of Shabbos (vehicular travel, automated registration, electronic charting). Which path is halachically required?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if a non-Jewish driver (or ambulance) is available, one should certainly travel to the hospital to suture the child under local anesthesia rather than stitching raw flesh without anesthesia, since amirah l'nochri is permitted for any medical need of a child. Even if no non-Jewish driver is available, because the excruciating pain

and terror of suturing a child's deep wound without anesthesia can itself pose a medical danger to the child (as the Bach writes in Orach Chaim 328), one may rely on the poskim (including the Maharshag) to transport him to the hospital where anesthesia is available.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 330

Yair was a graphic designer who worked at a marketing firm in Israel. His company was contracted by a large chain store in Israel to make a series of ads. The chain store wanted all the ads to prominently say “We are open every day of the week, 24 hours a day”. This of course meant that the Jewish owned chain was open and operated on Shabbos, in Israel. Yair, who was an observant Jew was assigned with designing the ads. He felt torn. Should he make the ad? Would it be a Chillul Hashem, a desecration of Hashem’s name to make an ad that advertised that a Jewish owned company operated on Shabbos? On the other hand if he refuses he may get fired or docked pay. Furthermore, he himself was not desecrating Shabbos. And the company would be breaking Shabbos with or without his ad design. Can he make the ad? Should he risk getting fired for this? What do you think?

Answer: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules unequivocally (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 469; Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kamma 32b, p. 223): A Jew is obligated to suffer financial loss and forfeit the 5,000 shekel penalty rather than design or voice an advertisement promoting a business operating on Shabbos! Rav Zilberstein invokes the verse, 'Cursed is he who degrades his father' (Arur makleh aviv). If a person is forbidden to open a noxious business in his earthly father's courtyard against his wishes, how much more so is one forbidden to spread the poison of public desecration of Hashem, His holy Torah, and the testimony of Creation. Advertising that a store operates on Shabbos is a public desecration of Hashem's holy Name (Chillul Hashem). A Jew is biblically obligated to surrender all his wealth rather than commit a Chillul Hashem; therefore, the artist must refuse the assignment and gladly pay the penalty to sanctify the Shabbos. (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 469; Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kamma 32b, p. 223)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 469; Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kamma 32b, p. 223

A thirteen year old boy named Ari was raised in a non-orthodox home. Ari slowly started observing many of the mitzvos until he eventually started keeping Shabbos. As Ari grew in his observance, he asked his parents if he can start attending a Torah day school. His parents approved and paid for him to attend. Ari's parents in general were quite tolerant of his observance. As Ari's grandparents got older his parents insisted that they drive to visit them every Shabbos. Ari knew he couldn't drive in a car on Shabbos. He asked his father if he could stay home and visit a different day. "Ari," his father replied, "We have been very supportive of your observance up until now. It has not been easy for us, but we want you to be happy. This, however, is a red line. If you don't visit my parents with us, it will be very embarrassing. I know that you are behaving this way because that is what you are taught in your Orthodox school. If you don't come with us to Zeidy's house, we are going to take you out of that school and place you in a normal public school like your friends." Ari felt stuck. He knew that if he left his school it would be exceedingly difficult to remain observant. If he would ride in the car he would only be a passive passenger, he would not be actively doing melacha, breaking Shabbos. Should he ride in the car on Shabbos in order to stay in the Torah school? On the other hand, is it permitted to violate Shabbos in order to stay in a Torah school? What do you think? Can Ari ride in the car with his parents?

Answer: He is not allowed to violate Shabbos in order to stay in a religious school.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume One, p. 169

The Steinbergs, an American family once made a bar mitzvah in a hotel in Israel. On Shabbos, Ari, the bar mitzvah boy, read from the Torah and they had a beautiful catered affair. After the Shabbos, Mrs. Steinberg remarked that it was such a shame that there was no way to take pictures or video the event. That gave Ari the bar mitzvah boy a great idea. He realized that the hotel had security cameras in every room. He asked the hotel manager if it would be ok if they gave him a digital file of the security footage. The manager agreed and gave Ari the video. The footage was in color and it was in pretty high resolution. Ari was able to find the video of the Shabbos davening, his reading from the Torah, the affair, and the speeches. He isolated that footage, edited it, added music and produced a fantastic video of all the events on his Shabbos bar mitzvah. He excitedly showed his well-produced video to his parents. When Mrs. Schwartz saw the video she was struck whether this video was appropriate or not. There is a concept of not benefiting from chillul Shabbos. In this case would it be permitted to use the footage taken on Shabbos for security purposes as a memento of the bar mitzvah. On one hand the video was not created in violation of Shabbos. But on the other hand is it permitted to benefit from a video created on Shabbos? What do you think?

Answer: To last week's dilemma, Rav Zilberstein responded that they should not use the footage of the video camera.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 044 (Zos Habracha)

There was an organization active in Kiruv and teaching Torah that needed to run a fundraiser. Reb Pinchas, the leader of the organization, turned to his partner and said, "Reb Yossi, I have a great idea. For this year's campaign, let's announce in our weekly Shabbos newsletter that the first volume of our long awaited book will be available for anyone who gives a significant donation". Reb Yossi turned to Reb Pinchas and said, "I'm not sure that would be permitted. It would be like using the Shabbos newsletter to sell books and you can't sell books on Shabbos". Reb Pinchas replied, "I'm not sure you are right, Yossi. We know that you are allowed to commit to give tzedakah on Shabbos. We also know that you are even allowed to sell aliyos on Shabbos. That is permitted because it is raising funds for tzedakah." Reb Yossi replied, "I'm not sure selling books is the same as selling intangible aliyos. We know that shuls are not allowed to sell seats in the shul on Shabbos, and they can't sell leftover esrogim on Shabbos, even if it is a fundraiser. I think when it's a physical item you can't sell it on Shabbos even if it's for tzedakah". Reb Pinchas responded, "Announcing in the newsletter that the book is available to those who give tzedakah is not really selling. It's just letting people know that it is available". They decided that they would bring this question to a Rav. What do you think? Can one announce on Shabbos that a book will be given to anyone who gives a given amount to this organization? Is that like selling aliyos on Shabbos, or is it perhaps like selling esrogim and shul seats on Shabbos?

Answer: Regarding the question about the outreach organization's interest in announcing their new book at their annual fundraising event Rabbi Dovid Heber said it is permitted to advertise it in their Shabbos newsletter.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 220 (Mishpatim)

A man of very modest means could only afford two suits in his wardrobe. One suit was made of lightweight, inexpensive cloth, while the other was tailored from a significantly more expensive, distinguished, and durable wool fabric. He faced an interesting dilemma regarding how to allocate his two suits: If he wore the high-quality, distinguished suit during the workweek, it would withstand the daily wear and tear of earning a living, leaving the cheaper suit for Shabbos where it would remain clean, unworn, and crisp. On the other hand, the mitzvah of honoring Shabbos (kavod Shabbos) calls for wearing one's finest garments. Should he wear the cheaper, fresher-looking suit for

Shabbos to preserve the good suit for daily labor, or should he dedicate the inherently more prestigious suit to Shabbos? Which is more important for kavod Shabbos—an inherently more chashuv (prestigious) garment, or a garment that looks less worn? What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that he should designate the more chashuv (prestigious and expensive) suit specifically for Shabbos. The primary requirement of kavod Shabbos ("shelo yehei malbushcha shel Shabbos k'malbushcha shel chol") is to adorn oneself in one's finest, most honorable clothing in honor of the Holy Day. An inherently superior, dignified garment brings greater honor to the Shabbos Queen than a cheap garment, even if the cheap garment is worn less frequently. Therefore, his best garment belongs to Shabbos.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 234

A Torah outreach organization that publishes a weekly Shabbos table pamphlet distributed in synagogues before Shabbos wanted to attach a pre-addressed donation envelope to each pamphlet for its upcoming annual fundraising campaign. Can they do this without encountering any halachic problems on Shabbos? On the one hand, perhaps a donation envelope is muktzeh on Shabbos since it is designated for mailing money, and the pamphlet is read primarily on Shabbos. On the other hand, since the pamphlets are delivered to the synagogues on Wednesday, people can detach the envelope before Shabbos, and furthermore, perhaps an envelope is not muktzeh at all since it can also be used to hold papers or divrei Torah. Is attaching the envelope permitted?

Answer: Regarding last week's question regarding including an envelope with TableTalk, Rabbi Heber said that an envelope in its own right is not muktza as it can be used to store Divrei Torah. Nevertheless, TableTalk should not have an envelope stapled to them since it is not in the spirit of Shabbos. However, if they are taken before Shabbos it is fine, since the envelopes will be removed before Shabbos.

— Source: Rav Chaim Kanievsky & Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Archive

Daniel was the president of a shul in Baltimore. His shul had recently received a government grant to enhance security due to a rise in anti-Semitic attacks across the United States. As a result, numerous security cameras were installed throughout the premises, including several that provided a clear view of the bimah and the interior of the shul. Daniel was responsible for allocating aliyos and tracking the pledges associated with each. He usually kept a record of these details on an index card box. But one week he misplaced the index card box. He distributed the aliyos and hoped to try to remember who got which aliya and how much they pledged. However, after Shabbos, Daniel struggled to recall which congregant received which aliyah and the corresponding pledges. But then Daniel had an idea. He wondered if he could use the security footage recorded on Shabbos to help him recall the information. The recordings captured both audio and video, making it possible to see and hear the aliyos and pledges. However, he was uncertain whether it would be appropriate to use the footage for such a purpose. On one hand, the security cameras were installed and videoed on Shabbos due to a potentially life-threatening situation (pikuach nefesh) and may not be intended for more trivial matters. On the other hand, one could argue that since the footage already exists, it is permissible to use it for more mundane purposes, such as tracking aliyos and pledges. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding use of security cameras, Rav Heinemann paskens that any activity on Shabbos which indirectly causes information to be stored on a computer is permissible, as long as nothing appears on a screen and no lights change color — i.e., nothing detectable by the five human senses occurs. The fact that the information is stored 'invisibly' on the computer is not a problem, as the Torah does not forbid 'invisible' things. For this reason, a person may walk in front of a video camera

on Shabbos, even though it will cause his image to be recorded to a hard drive. Regarding use of the footage, it would seem that this would create a pirtzah which could quickly unravel, as before long relatives unable to attend a bar mitzvah would watch it.

— Source: Rav Tzvi Berkowitz / Table Talk

There was once a famous professional chazzan in Yerushalayim who had an operatic, high pitched voice. He was once invited to a shul to lead the davening. In his earnestness to inspire the kehilla, his voice was so powerful that he broke several of the thin fluorescent bulbs in the Shul's light fixture. Thankfully no one was hurt, but the Chazzan had two questions. First of all, did he have an obligation to pay the shul for the damage? On one hand he broke the glass, but on the other hand it was in the course of his doing his job for the shul. Second of all, he wondered, was he allowed to raise his voice that high on Shabbos if it might break glass? One is not allowed to purposely break glass on Shabbos. Was he allowed to sing that high on Shabbos? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of the Chazan breaking the lightbulb, Rav Zilberstein answered that he was liable to pay for the damages because of grama benezikin, but it was permitted on Shabbos because it was "misasek".

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Hebrew Veharev Na Volume One, p. 180

Yaakov woke up one Shabbos morning and heard rustling in his backyard shed. He quickly ran out and saw a young teenage boy, perhaps 13 years old, in his shed trying to steal his bike. On instinct Yaakov closed the door and locked it with the combination lock. He had trapped the potential burglar red-handed. Once the burglar was trapped he had someone notify the police and they arrested the boy. After the excitement died down, Yaakov's son turned to him and asked, "Abba, I learned that you are not allowed to trap on Shabbos. How were you allowed to trap that boy?" Yaakov realized that his son had a point. It is true that one can't do tzeidah (trap) on Shabbos but did that even apply to a person? Even if it did apply to a person, would that forbid trapping a burglar? Would he have to let the burglar go free? Wouldn't that put people at risk? Did Yaakov do the right thing or the wrong thing by trapping the young burglar on Shabbos?

Answer: Regarding the question of whether it was permitted to lock the door on the burglar, Rav Zilberstein answered that a human being, with his Tzelem Elokim, Divine Image, is inherently not a min hanitzad, a species that is normally hunted. This is true even though there are criminals who are hunted and incarcerated. Therefore it would be permitted to trap him on Shabbos in this case.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Volume One, p. 333 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 073 (Tazria Metzorah))

Yaakov lived in Eretz Yisroel, in an apartment building that was designed specifically so that residents could build their Sukkahs on their porches. The building was constructed in such a way that the bottom floor's porch extended the farthest outward, while each successive floor's porch was built slightly further in. It was a tapered system, designed so that everyone could have a Sukkah on their own porch without a porch covering the one beneath it. One Shabbos, Yaakov, who lived on the top floor, was sitting on his porch learning. As was his custom, he was eating garinim, sunflower seeds, while he learned. He became so engrossed in his learning that before he realized it, there was a whole pile of empty sunflower seed shells on a plate on the small table beside him. After a while, he went inside for a moment to get a drink, leaving the pile of garinim shells on the table. Meanwhile, on the floor below, the Schwartz family was preparing for a big celebration. Their grandson had made a siyum on Seder Moed, and they wanted to mark the occasion in style. They had purchased a large ice cream cake from Katzefet, beautifully decorated with whipped cream, and set it on a table in the center of their porch as part of a festive spread. Just then, there was a knock at the door.

Their grandson had arrived! Excitedly, they welcomed him in, eager to show him the beautiful setup and the cake they knew he loved. They all stepped out onto the porch, and to their horror, the cake was completely covered in sunflower seed shells. They were shocked, embarrassed, and disgusted. The beautiful cake was ruined, and they ended up throwing it out. It was clear that what had happened was that while Yaakov went inside, the wind blew the empty shells off his porch and onto the porch beneath him. Later, the Schwartzes investigated where the shells could have come from and discovered that their upstairs neighbor, Yaakov, had been eating sunflower seeds on his porch. Mr. Schwartz said, "The Gemara says that if a person leaves a stone or a knife on a roof and it falls and causes damage, that person is liable. Since you left the sunflower seed shells on your porch and they blew down onto our cake, you are certainly responsible, not only for ruining the cake but for spoiling our whole siyum!" Yaakov felt terrible when he heard what had happened. He hadn't realized that the shells had blown down, and he told the Schwartzes he would accept whatever the Rav ruled. Still, he wondered: was he really obligated? After all, he had simply been eating on his own porch. Was he not even allowed to leave a small pile of shells there for a minute? So they brought the question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Is Yaakov liable for the damage and embarrassment caused to the Schwartzes, or is he exempt?

Answer: Regarding the question about the sunflower seed shells that fell onto the cake, Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstein answered that this case differs from one in which someone leaves a knife or a stone that falls down. A knife or a stone is objectively damaging, whereas these shells are only situationally damaging; they cause harm only if there happens to be an ice cream cake below them. Therefore, the person on top had the right to eat the seeds and leave the shells on his own porch, and he is not obligated to pay for the cake.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Hebrew Edition, Volume 4, p. 268

Ari was next-door neighbors with Zev, and they were very close. One day Ari was walking outside at night and he was approached by armed robbers. "Give me the keys to your car", the robber said, "and no one will get hurt". Ari was not going to risk his life to fight with the robbers and he reached into his pocket for his keys. Ari thought to himself, "how am I going to find these robbers and relocate my stolen car?" But then he had an idea. His good friend Zev, who lived next door, had a LoJack antitheft GPS Location Tracker installed in his car. What the LoJack did, was, in case a car was stolen, the police can locate its location at all times via gps satellite. If the robbers would steal both his car as well as Zev's car, then the police would easily be able to find both cars. Ari wondered to himself if he was allowed to tell the robbers how to steal his friend's car in order to quickly retrieve both cars. On one hand, how could he harm his friend by aiding in the theft of his friend's car? But on the other hand, the police should find both cars quickly and the result will be that both cars are saved and the robbers taken off the streets. Ari decided that he was going to go forward with his idea. "Hey, I have an idea for you", Ari said to the thugs. "Why are you stealing my car? My car is worth less than ten thousand dollars. But my neighbor's car is worth at least 40 thousand dollars. Why don't you take his car and leave mine? I can show you where he keeps his keys." One of the robbers turned to Ari. "That is such a good idea. Not only will we take your car, we will take the neighbor's car as well". Then raising his weapon to Ari, the thug said, "Where are his keys? Ari showed them where Zev hid a spare key and the robbers happily made off with both cars. But not for long. As soon as the robbers left, Ari called the police and the police were easily able to locate the two stolen cars. The police apprehended the robbers and returned both cars within 24 hours of their theft. The gang of thieves was locked up for a long time. It seems that Ari's ingenuity saved the day and resulted in both cars being returned. And the gang of thieves being apprehended and locked up for a long time. But later Ari sent this question to Rav Zilberstein. Did he have a right to show the robbers how to steal his neighbor's car in order to retrieve his car and apprehend the thieves? He caused his neighbor to temporarily lose his car, but the result was the permanent apprehension of dangerous criminals and the retrieval of his car. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the Lojack, Rav Zilberstein writes that if it would not be a question of life and death, then one is not allowed to save himself with the property of his friend, and he could not give over his friend's car to save his own. (If taking the thieves off the streets would be a matter of life and death then it would be permitted.) However, because he used his friend's Lojack to save his car, he should pay his friend for a third of the cost of the Lojack.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 174

Dovid and his wife were expecting a baby. Dovid's wife went into labor on Friday night. He grabbed the phone book and looked for a car service. Dovid knew that he was allowed to call on Shabbos because going into labor is a life and death matter. He called the first car service number that he saw in the phonebook. When the call was answered, Dovid said that he would like a car as soon as possible to go to the hospital. The man said they would be happy to drive them to the hospital. The man then told Dovid it would cost $400.00 for the drive. Dovid exclaimed, "$400? What do you mean? The hospital is only a few blocks away!" The man replied, "You might not have realized, but you're not calling a regular taxi service. You called a limousine service. We're sending you a stretch SUV Cadillac limousine. It has enormous space and is very luxurious. It's the same car we use to drive around celebrities and world leaders. $400 is actually a great deal." Dovid thanked the man and then wondered to himself. He didn't need a big limousine to take his wife to the hospital. His wife would likely be uncomfortable and embarrassed to go into labor in a giant limousine. Furthermore, he didn't need to spend $400; he could spend $10 for a taxi to the hospital. He wondered if he was allowed to hang up and call the next number in the phonebook. On one hand, he thought, once he was already in the mode of calling on Shabbos, he could just call someone else. But on the other hand, he thought the only reason he had permission to call a car service was because his wife's life was in danger. It was pikuach nefesh. Once the limousine was coming, she was no longer in immediate danger, and now it was just a question of saving money and a little bit of embarrassment. So, Dovid wanted to know if he has to take the stretch limo to the hospital, or could he call another taxi service on Shabbos? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about taking the limousine to the hospital, Rabbi Zilberstein writes that one is not allowed to break Shabbos just to save money. In this case, because he has a car available to pick him up, he is not allowed to call another car that is not a limousine just because it will save money. Regarding the question of breaking Shabbos to avoid the embarrassment of riding in a limousine to the hospital, Rabbi Zilberstein further writes (ibid, p. 90, a different case than the limousine story) that, generally speaking, one is not allowed to break Shabbos to avoid embarrassment, even when someone is in labor.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Devarim, p. 87

There was a store in Israel that sold crystal items -- crystal vases, crystal tableware, crystal frames, crystal candelabras, and so on. One day, when the store was empty, and only the clerk was present, a man dressed in black walked in, carrying a duffel bag. Without saying a word, he began stuffing many of the crystal items into the bag. The clerk didn't want to physically confront the thief and didn't know what to do. If he called the police, the thief might escape before they arrived. Then, the clerk had an idea. He quickly ran out the front door, locked it, and trapped the thief inside. The door was made of shatterproof, bulletproof glass. The thief tried to escape, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't break through it. Realizing he was trapped, the thief called out to the clerk and said, "Okay, you got me. I'll leave everything in the bag if you let me go, and we'll call it even." The clerk ignored him. The thief, raising the stakes, said, "Alright, if you let me go, I'll leave everything behind. But if you don't unlock the door right now, I'll smash every item in the store. If I do that, you'll lose more than $100,000 in merchandise. But if you let me go, there won't be any damage or loss." The clerk now faced a dilemma. He didn't own the store and didn't want his boss to suffer such a massive financial loss. At the same time, he was worried that if he let the thief go, the man might rob other stores -- or

even harm the clerk himself. In the end, the clerk decided to keep the door locked and refused to negotiate. Frustrated, the thief went from shelf to shelf, smashing every single item in the store. Before long, all that remained were shattered pieces of crystal scattered across the floor. Nothing was left intact. Eventually, the police arrived and arrested the thief. However, the thief had no money, and the authorities were unable to recover any funds to cover the damages. Insurance only covered part of the loss, and the store owner was left with a substantial financial burden. After everything had settled, the store owner confronted the clerk and said, "I heard what happened. You had a choice: let the thief go or let him destroy everything. Now I'm the one stuck with this huge loss because of your decision. I think it's only fair that you pay for my loss since it was your choice to keep him locked inside. I would have much preferred he just leave and leave my items in the store." They agreed to bring this question to Rav Zilberstein. Was the clerk responsible for the damage by keeping the thief locked inside? Should the clerk have let the thief go to avoid the damage and save the owner from financial loss? Or did he have a right to keep the thief locked in, even though it would cause his boss a huge loss? On one hand, the clerk was responsible for making sure no one damaged his boss's property. On the other hand, did the clerk have the right to let the thief escape into the community and put others at risk? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the robber who got locked inside the crystal store, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein answered that the clerk is considered a paid watchman (a shomer sachar). A shomer sachar is responsible for guarding property according to what is considered normal for his time and place. It is expected and reasonable that the shomer sachar would not want the thief running loose and potentially causing harm to him. Therefore, since the clerk's behavior was deemed normal -- and this was presumably understood when the clerk was hired -- the clerk was permitted to keep the thief locked in, even if it might cause damage to the store owner's property.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Devarim, p. 339

Arye made a siyum on a large mesechta and was very excited about it. He decided to make a fancy dinner to celebrate and invited 25 of his close friends to a Simchah hall. He contacted a caterer and told him he wanted a lavish and fancy party. The caterer, Shmuel, was happy to take the job. Shmuel suggested a delicious and exciting menu to Arye. Arye agreed to Shmuel's ideas and was excited about them. Arye paid for the caterer in full on the day of the event. The day of the siyum arrived, and all of Arye's friends arrived at the Simchah hall. The meal was delicious, and people kept complimenting Arye and Shmuel about the delicious food. There was course after course, and people kept praising the amazing food. Finally, the meal was over, and dessert was served. The waiters brought out a delicious chocolate mousse with whipped cream on top. The mousse was delicious. The siyum was done, and things were moving to a close. But about a half hour, after the mousse was served, one of the guests vomited right at the table. A few minutes later, another person vomited. Then another. Soon nearly everyone who ate the chocolate moose had to run to the bathroom or sink to empty their stomach. It was extremely embarrassing to everyone who was there, especially to Arye. It was clear to everyone that something caused everyone to get food poisoning. Shmuel immediately investigated, and sure enough, there was salmonella in the mousse. That bacteria caused the food poisoning. Thankfully no one got seriously sick. But it put a dark cloud over Arye's joyous Simchah. A few days after the event, Shmuel approached Arye and told him how bad he felt over the debacle and offered to refund the price of all of the mousse. Arye was unhappy with that offer. "A refund on just the mousse?" Arye argued. "nearly everyone threw up the entire meal. How can you charge me for the rest of the meal if the entire affair was ruined?" Shmuel, who had paid a great deal of money for the raw food, was unable to give a complete refund. Shmuel countered that the rest of the food was greatly enjoyed by everyone. He was unable to refund that. Arye then countered that not only should Shmuel refund the entire catering fee, but Shmuel should pay damages to Arye for causing him so much humiliation and shame. They agreed to bring this question to a

Rav. What do you think? Is Arye entitled to a complete refund of the entire meal? Or just the price of the mousse? On the one hand, people did enjoy the first courses. But on the other hand, because they threw up all their meals, it ruined the whole meal. In addition, would Shmuel be obligated to pay extra damages to Arye for causing him so much shame?

Answer: Regarding the question about the mousse, Rav Zilberstein wrote that a meal with a dessert that will make everyone sick is worth nothing, (has no market value) so even though they enjoyed the first part of the meal, the customer would be exempt from paying the caterer. If there were guests who did not eat the dessert and did not get sick, those meals would have to be paid for. However, the caterer is not obligated to pay for any damages for embarrassment to the customer.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Bereishis, p. 419

Mr. Klein was an elderly man who lived in a nursing home in Eretz Yisrael. He had no immediate relatives who lived in Eretz Yisrael with him. He did have a cousin who lived around five miles away from the nursing home. Sadly, as Mr Klein got older, he developed Alzheimer's. Sometimes Alzheimer's patients have a tendency to wander off. One Shabbos, when everyone was preoccupied, Mr. Klein decided that he was going to visit his cousin. He headed off to his cousins home without telling anyone. It was a nice day, and although it was a very long walk, Mr. Klein didn't mind. He arrived at his cousin's home on Shabbos afternoon and had a very nice visit. Mr. Klein's cousin, Yanky, thought it was strange that Mr. Klein visited him, but he didn't think anything was wrong. Meanwhile, at the nursing home, shortly after Mr. Klein was discovered missing, the nursing home staff went into a panic. They immediately called the police to look for the wandering elderly man. At least five squad cars spent the entire afternoon patrolling the area looking for Mr. Klein. They were unsuccessful. The nursing home director and staff spent the entire afternoon searching the area in cars to find Mr. Klein because they felt this was pikuach nefesh. Unfortunately it was without any success. As soon as Shabbos was over, Yanky nonchalantly drove Mr. Klein back to the nursing home. When Mr. Klein walked in, the nursing staff breathed a collective sigh of relief. But the relief of their anxiety was soon converted into great frustration. The nursing home director, who was an observant Jew, angrily turned to Yanky. "Why didn't you think to tell us that Mr, Klein was with you? We spent the entire day looking all over for him. The entire staff dropped everything and was searching for him. The police were driving around town the entire day." Yanky was confused. "Why should I call on Shabbos? Who was in danger? Mr. Klein was safe with me in my living room." The nursing home administrator replied, "You don't understand! It was pikuach nefesh because the whole staff was unable to attend to the other sick patients in the nursing home, everyone was looking for Mr Klein. Furthermore, so many of the police's resources were tied up looking for Mr Klein, which could potentially be harmful if there were any other emergencies. And finally, because you didn't call, you caused much more chillul Shabbos by having Jews drive around the whole day looking for him." Yanky wasn't so sure and brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Should Yanky have called the nursing home on Shabbos when Mr. Klein arrived? On one hand there didn't seem to be an immediate pikuach nefesh issue. But on the other hand, because the nursing staff and police's resources were preoccupied, that put the whole nursing home and the whole community at risk. In addition, because he didn't call, he caused many more Jews to drive on Shabbos. What do you think? Was he supposed to call?

Answer: Regarding the question about calling the nursing home to let them know that the Alzheimer's patient was there, Rav Zilberstein said that the cousin would not be allowed to call directly. The fact that the Jews were driving on Shabbos was not a problem because they were actually doing a mitzvah by driving. However, the cousin should have asked a non-Jew to make the call. He can do amira leakum, to prevent the other patients from getting less care.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 556 (Table Talk Edition 130)

A doctor needs to do surgery on Shabbos. If he smokes he will be more relaxed and steady, and do a better job. Can he smoke on Shabbos?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein cites Rav Betzalel Zolty zt"l, who hesitated to permit a surgeon to smoke on Shabbos because each puff is a separate Torah prohibition and it is impossible to measure the exact number of puffs needed for steady hands. However, where a life-saving operation is at stake and the surgeon knows that severe withdrawal tremors will endanger the patient's life on the operating table, pikuach nefesh overrides Shabbos to the minimum extent strictly necessary to prevent tremors.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Metzia, p. 464

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The wicked Roman governor Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: 'How does this seventh day of yours differ from all other days?' Rabbi Akiva countered: 'And how does one distinguished man like yourself differ from other men?' Turnus Rufus said: 'Because my master the Emperor wished to honor me!' Rabbi Akiva replied: 'So too regarding the Shabbos—my Master, the King of Kings, wished to honor it!' Turnus Rufus demanded: 'Who says that today is actually the seventh day on which God rested?' Rabbi Akiva answered: 'Let the River Sambatyon prove it, which hurls stones all six days of the week and rests completely on Shabbos; let the necromancer prove it, whose sorcery cannot raise a spirit on Shabbos; and let your own father's grave prove it, from which smoke rises all six days of the week and ceases on Shabbos while the souls rest!'

Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishis Remez 16 (and Sanhedrin 65b)

❖ Throughout the week Shammai would prepare for Shabbos. When he saw a nice object or dish he would put it away for Shabbos (Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, p. 107). It was said of him that his whole life he ate to honor Shabbos. If he saw a fine animal, he would save it for Shabbos. If he later found a nicer animal, he would eat the first one and save the nicer one for Shabbos.

Talmud Bavli, Beitzah 16a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ For many years, Rav Pam ended his Friday mesivta class with a shiur in Mesillas Yesharim. In 1952, when the class was learning "mishkal hachasidus" ("the balance of piety ") Rav Pam taught this lesson through a real-life example. On an Erev Shabbos in the month of Elul as the day drew to a close, he said, "Bachurim, I need your help with something." He went on to say that the landlord of his apartment in East New York had informed him that he was raising the monthly rent from $40 to $45. Rav Pam told his talmidim that he could afford a raise of about $2.50 a month but not $5. He felt that if he told this to the landlord, the man would most probably relent and settle for the lower amount. However, he would not be happy about it and bad feelings might linger. Rav Pam wished to avoid this, especially since the landlord was his neighbor and good relations with neighbors is crucial. There was one way to solve this dilemma. "The arbah minim (four species) which I buy each year costs between 25 and 30 dollars. I am the 'Shabbos Rav' where I daven," Rav Pam told his talmidim. "The shul purchases an arbah minim set so that those who do not own one can fulfill the mitzvah. If I were to forgo purchasing my own set and use the shul's, I would have the additional money I need to pay the $5 raise. My question is: what is the right thing to do? Should I purchase my own set as usual and ask the landlord to settle for a smaller raise, or should I forgo my purchase of arbah minim for this year and give him the raise that he wants? "Think about it and Sunday you will let me

know what you decided." Sunday morning, Rav Pam asked for a show of hands in favor of his suggestion. Most felt that it would be proper to forgo purchasing the arba'ah minim so that the landlord could be given the raise he sought. Rav Pam smiled. "I thought the same," he said.

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ It was Erev Shabbos, only hours before licht bentchen, the phone rang in the home of R' Nosson Zev Nussbaum. It was the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon. After greeting him warmly, the Mashgiach asked, "Perhaps it is possible to find a dentist who will still treat me before Shabbos. I really need a dentist today." "Oy!" R' Nosson Zev commiserated, "if the Mashgiach is calling now, he must be in tremendous pain. Otherwise, he would wait until after Shabbos." "No," Rav Mattisyahu replied, "I can manage with the pain. The reason for the urgency is that the dental issue that I have is preventing me from smiling a full smile. Tonight, the entire yeshivah will file past me to wish me a 'Gut Shabbos, expecting me to give them a full smile. Some people wait for this smile all week. If I don't go to the dentist and have the problem fixed, I won't be able to give them a full smile!" It was an imperative that the Mashgiach constantly stressed. It was imperative that an oveid Hashem should be b'simchah, happy and full of joy and good cheer. When he came to Lakewood, one of the first things that he spoke about and demanded was just that, simchah. When people would file past to wish him a "Gut Shabbos" on Friday night, he would ask them, "Where is your smile? You are learning Torah! You have the zechus to serve Hashem! Why is that simchah not visible on your face?!" He would relate from the Alter of Slabodka that, "If a person who is a yarei Shamayim is not happy, it is almost a declaration that it is not worthwhile to serve Hashem. His sour face is, as it were, screaming, 'It is not worthwhile to serve Hashem." He once told a person close to him that he knows of a Yid who would wake up in the morning and dance for five minutes, singing, "Shelo asani goy." "My feeling," he commented, "is that he was talking about himself!" Another common refrain of the Mashgiach's was, "When a ben Torah gets up from his seat after learning a proper mussar seder, he should have a smile on his face."

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ During Shabbos on that same trip, the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon, got up on a table so that his powerful address could be seen and heard. As the Mashgiach was being assisted off the table, he was approached by an elderly Russian Yid. "Rebbi!" the Yid cried out, "I am now seventy years old, and I never had a bris. Please! I want to have a bris right now!" The Mashgiach pulled the Yid into an embrace, hugging him and kissing him. "Reb Yid," the Mashgiach replied gently, "today is Shabbos, and unless a bris is held on the eighth day of life, we can't make a bris on Shabbos. Please come back tomorrow, and we will make a bris." R' Shimon Brook, who was with the Mashgiach at the time, commented, "What a shame! We missed the opportunity! Today he was ready and full of enthusiasm, but I'm almost certain he won't come back tomorrow..." Imagine R' Shimon's surprise when on Sunday the Yid returned, and not only did he return himself, but he brought his son and his grandson with him. All three generations underwent a bris on that day. The Mashgiach was elated. Joyously, he turned to R' Shimon. "You see, Shimonke," he said, "if you follow the dictates of the Torah, Hashem helps. Because we couldn't give him a bris on Shabbos, we now merited that in addition to his having a bris, his son and grandson joined him!"

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ R' Ezriel Munk's cell phone rang. A look at the caller ID, and he quickly answered. "Reb Ezriel," The Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon's warm voice greeted him, "I need your help." "My help? Sure!" R' Ezriel was all ears. "Do you by any chance know Senator Joseph Lieberman?" The Mashgiach, who knew that R' Ezriel was involved in kiruv and was thus well connected, continued, "I happen to know a bachur whom I think the senator can help. This bachur, a tenth grader and an orphan, is struggling. He keeps on adamantly insisting that he wants to leave yeshivah. Knowing that we could lose him if, chas v'shalom, he leaves the yeshivah, I asked him what it would take to get him to stay in yeshivah. He told me that he loves politics, and if he were able to meet and talk with Senator Joseph Lieberman, and the senator would advise him to

remain in yeshivah, he would listen to him. "I would love to help," R' Ezriel answered apologetically, "but I don't know Senator Leiberman." The Mashgiach's five-word retort stopped R' Ezriel in his tracks, "So get to know him. We need to save the life of this bachur!" Two days passed. The conversation was at the forefront of R' Ezriel's mind, but he had still not come up with a way to meet Senator Lieberman. It was late in the day when R' Ezriel was circulating at an upscale dinner in Manhattan. Suddenly, who walked right in front of him? None other than Senator Lieberman and his whole entourage! With the Mashgiach's words fresh in his mind, he thought, I need to act now. I will never have another chance to meet him casually like this. Running over to the senator, R' Ezriel pushed his way through the outer circle until he was standing directly in front of him. Time." "Senator!" R' Ezriel exclaimed. "Please, I need three minutes of your time." When the senator saw R' Ezriel's serious demeanor, he said, "Okay, hold on." A few minutes later, he gave R' Ezriel his full attention. R' Ezriel described the young orphan's situation, how just by speaking to him, the senator would ensure that the boy would have a future in Yiddishkeit. "Really," the senator replied, "I would love to speak to him. But I am not in charge of my time. I have a very tight schedule, and my aides make sure I function on schedule and get from one place to the next." "But, Mr. Lieberman!" R' Ezriel pressed, "just think: You could change the entire trajectory of his life. You could make a difference to whether or not he stays in yeshivah!" Just then, someone walked past, handing out ArtScroll commemorative bentchers. Taking one of the bentchers, the senator opened it and asked for the boy's name. "Dovid," R' Ezriel answered, "his name is Dovid." "Dovid," the senator wrote inside the bentcher, "With thanks for all the Torah learning and mitzvos you are doing, and every good wish." Signed, Joseph Lieberman, senator from Connecticut. Needless to say, Dovid remained in yeshivah and today is the father of a wonderful family. R' Munk concludes, "What amazed me more than anything was the Mashgiach's bitachon and siyata d'Shmaya. He knew that this was what he needed to do, and he was certain that once he had done his hishtadlus, Hashem would take care of the rest. And He did! When you care about every yachid, Hashem enables you to help them!" Indeed, the Mashgiach's home was the address for anyone who needed a guiding hand and warm encouragement. It served as a place of refuge, chizuk, and succor throughout the week as well as on Shabbos and Yom Tov. The Salomon home became a beacon of light, hope, and care for so many people men, women, and children from all walks of life.

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ On Friday, April 27 (14 Iyar), a strange event took place, which was afterwards referred to as the "false liberation." when the train made a stop in a small village, some SS officers burst into the railcars and announced, "You are free!" With dramatic gestures, they tore their Wehrmacht emblems off their uniforms. Many of the prisoners believed the announcement and hurriedly got off the train, running in every direction to look for food and other necessities. The Klausenberger Rebbe, however, immediately turned to the people around him and asked, "Today is erev, Shabbos, where will we go?" In the same breath he whispered, "My heart tells me that not everything here is as it should be." He suggested that all remain for the moment in the cars. Only some of the men took his advice. Suddenly and without warning, SS troops on bicycles appeared from all directions, machine guns in their hands, firing everywhere and killing hundreds. At the same time, American airplanes began dropping bombs everywhere, killing many innocent people. Only the Rebbe and those who stayed with him on the train because of Shabbos remained alive and uninjured. Then it was quiet. The shooting stopped. Darkness fell. Shabbos came. The men in the railcars were stunned by the day's events, bewildered and confused. Only the Rebbe was able to think clearly. He had one and only one concern at that moment: How could he fulfill the mitzvah of eating the Shabbos meals?

The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press

❖ On one of those occasions, there was an interesting occurrence on Friday afternoon. Rav Shach was in the room his hosts had set aside for him, while the lady of the house was busy preparing food for the Shabbos meals. Suddenly, her baby began to cry. She hurriedly placed the pot of food on the little kerosene stove and went to attend to the baby, but before she reached him, there was a sudden silence. Frightened, the mother dashed to the baby's crib to find out what had made

him stop crying so abruptly. To her surprise, there was Rav Shach, holding an open Gemara in his left hand, and holding the baby in the crook of his other arm, pacing back and forth "and rocking him, all the while murmuring soothingly, "lekoved Shabbos kodesh" Abashed to see such a distinguished talmid chacham engaged in a mundane task, the mother said, "Let the Rav please put the baby in his crib; I will take care of him and the Rav will return to his learning!" But in his pleasant way, Rav Shach replied, "In the Gemara it says that everyone is required to take part in preparing the Shabbos dishes. I can't help in the kitchen, but by rocking the baby, I enable the lady of the house to do her cooking in peace, and that way I have a part in the Shabbos preparations.

Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 559

❖ A certain greedy storekeeper in Radin used to close his shop late on Friday and reopen before the Shabbos had ended. The Chofetz Chaim said to him. "Let me tell you a story. There once was a potato farmer who carted his crop to a wholesaler. They agreed on a price per sack — but the farmer could not count; how would he know how many sacks there were? The wholesaler suggested, 'As the stevedores unload the sacks, I will give you a penny for each sack. When we are fully unloaded, I will exchange each penny for a gold coin.' The farmer agreed. As the wholesaler kept giving him pennies, the farmer couldn't resist the opportunity to put some of the pennies in his pocket. The wholesaler noticed but didn't react since every penny the farmer pocketed saved him the price of a sack. "You know the farmer was a fool," continued the sage of Radin, "but you act the same way. God made the Shabbos the source of all blessing. According to the Zohar, all six days of the week receive their sustenance from the Shabbos. Thus every hour of Shabbos observance provides sustenance and financial success for six weekday hours. How foolish to 'steal' an hour of Shabbos, when in reality you are stealing from yourself!"

The Haggadah Treasury

❖ Reb Yisroel Salanter was very sick in the latter part of his life. During that period, Reb Yisroel would move from place to place spreading his teachings of Mussar. It was known that he would tell his hosts, wherever he would be, that in the event of sickness that may occur on Shabbos they were not allowed to desecrate Shabbos to save his life. The reason for this strange request was because Reb Yisroel felt that he fell under the category of 'shepherds of sheep'. The Gemara teaches us in regards to such shepherds in the event they are found in a life threatening circumstance on Shabbos one may not desecrate the Shabbos to save them. The reason for this ruling is because, as a general rule, such shepherds steal from the public by having their sheep pasture on property that is not theirs. They are therefore considered "gozeil es harabim" and as such, they are subject to this status. Reb Yisroel explained to his hosts; "the community supports me because they believe I am such a great tzadik and yorei shamayim. The truth, however, is that I am not who they think I am. Their support is actually not deserved and therefore I am a "gozeil es harabim". Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky had the good fortune to meet an older person who was a child in the home where Reb Yisroel passed away. The man was from Konigsberg and his father hosted Reb Yisroel. Reb Yaakov asked him if his family followed Reb Yisroel's request. Were they m'chalel Shabbos for Reb Yisroel's health? The man told Reb Yaakov that Reb Yisroel fell ill motzei Shabbos and passed away before the next Shabbos. Reb Yaakov exclaimed; "R'tzon yireiov yaaseh!", Hashem carries out the wish of those who fear Him. As told by Reb Yaakov to his grandson.

Table Talk, Edition 308 (Parshas Bereishis), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Shaya Cohen went off the derech and started selling drugs. He would travel to Israel to sell them and made a lot of money. One Friday he wanted to go to Israel to sell a very large amount. He couldn't get in touch with his supplier. Called him many times on Friday but could not get through. Finally he calls back on Friday evening. Suddenly Shaya felt an urge not to break Shabbos. He didn't answer the phone. The supplier then went away to Florida and Shaya could not get the drugs before his scheduled trip to Israel. He flies on the trip and when he lands he is pulled aside by four customs agents.

They are sure he has drugs. He says that you got the right guy at the wrong time. There isn't anything illegal on him and he was safe. Shaya realized that Shabbos was the reason he was saved and he became a baal teshuvah and got married and has a frum family.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A girl from a non-observant family, after attending a Chinuch Atzmai school, had become a ba'alas teshuvah. Her father was in the retail chandelier business, and each of his children was required to work me day a week in his store. It so happened that this girl's turn fell on the Shabbos. At first, she was torn between her family and Shabbos, not knowing which to honor. Finally, she decided that she would honor her father - but in her own way. Every Saturday morning, she walked to the store and politely stood behind the counter waiting for customers. But when they asked her how much an item cost, she quoted prices so preposterous that the customers immediately walked out. The girl was quite happy; she obeyed her father, but never made a single sale and so was never mechaleles Shabbos. After three weeks, her father began to wonder why he was doing no business on Saturdays. He decided to spy on his daughter. Just then a man entered and inquired about a $180 chandelier. "That chandelier is very special," the girl said. "That chandelier costs $1,000." The man said the price was too high and he left. The girl was relieved until she saw her enraged father coming toward her. "Why did you do that?" he bellowed. "Do you know how much money you've lost me?" The next day, the shopkeeper was surprised to see the man walk back into the store. "I realize that $1,000 is a lot of money," he said, pointing to the $180 chandelier, "but I really had my heart set on it. I looked all over the city for one like it, and found nothing else. So here," he added, reaching for his checkbook, "I'll give you $1,000 for it, all right?" Stunned, the shopkeeper sold him the chandelier, but only at its proper cost. He then turned to his daughter and softly announced that they had witnessed a supernatural event. It came from Shamayim (Heaven), he said, and it imparted a profound message. "From this day onward," he added, "the whole family will be shomer Shabbos. Like you."

A Fire in His Soul, By Amos Bunim, Published by Feldheim

❖ Rabbi David Ashear shared the following incredible story. Alex Clare, born in 1985, grew up in London with a totally secular background. He was passionate about music, and very talented. He played numerous instruments, sang, composed songs, and was determined to make music his career. In 2007, at the age of 22, he started learning about Judaism and felt very spiritually connected. He began keeping kosher and then committed to observing Shabbos. When he eventually signed a contract with a major record label, Island Records, he told them up front that he would not perform on Shabbos. They were not happy about it, but they agreed because he was so talented. He recorded his debut album with Island, but needed opportunities to promote it. As it happened, every event or appearance he was offered was scheduled for Friday night, and Alex turned them all down. Then, an excellent opportunity arose. He was offered the chance to do a world tour with a very famous British singer. His producers told him, "This is it, the chance you've been waiting for!" But Alex told them, "I'm sorry, it comes out on my holiday of Passover. I'm going to have to turn it down." His album was released that summer, but lack of name recognition precluded a positive response. Several months later, right after Yom Kippur, Alex had a message on his phone from Island Records. "You're not going to believe this, but BBC Radio told us that they had a cancellation for one of their segments and they want you to play live. This will be in front of a national audience and broadcast throughout Europe. You will receive national coverage and gain thousands of listeners. This is what we need to promote your album. The best part of it is that it's on a Thursday night, so you can do it." Alex couldn't believe the opportunity he was hearing about. Thursday night, however, was the first night of Succos. With a lot of courage, Alex called his promoters and said he couldn't do it. This was the last straw. They told him, "If you turn this down, we are voiding your contract. This will result in your being blacklisted and will basically end your very short career." At that time, Alex was penniless. He couldn't even make his next rent payment. But he began to think of the piyut he had read that day, on Yom Kippur, about Rabbi Amnon who gave up his life for Judaism. With tremendous strength, he said to himself, If he could give up his life, I can give up my music. He told his promoters that he would not play on his holiday under any circumstances, and indeed they voided his

contract. His dreams were shattered in an instant. Sorely in need of chizuk, Alex went to his Rabbi, Rabbi Dovid Tugendhaft. "Rabbi, I don't understand," he said. "All I have ever done since I came to religion is sacrifice for Judaism, and now I lose everything?" His Rabbi replied, "This reminds me of the story of Avraham Avinu. He invested his whole life toward changing the world and spreading the belief in One G-d, a loving and compassionate G-d Who doesn't want people sacrificing their children to idolatry. And then he was asked to sacrifice his own son, which would have made his teachings a mockery in the eyes of the world. Avraham would have to give up on his lifelong mission, but he did it and became great as a result. That was one of the greatest moments in Jewish history." The Rabbi continued, "Alex, you are being asked to give up your dream for Hashem. It will make you great." A few trying months passed, until one day, he received a phone call from Microsoft. They wanted to use one of his tracks to launch their new version of Internet Explorer. Of course, he agreed, and the song was used in an ad in March 2012. Soon the song was playing all over the world. It became the number one hit in Germany, number four on the U.K. singles chart and number seven in the U.S. His debut album sold over six million copies. Alex Clare became a multimillionaire; he did not lose by keeping Shabbos.

Table Talk, Edition 418 (Parshas Chanukah), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ There was a moshav where the rule was that there could be no public chillul Shabbos. One week a construction crew was very busy Friday afternoon and it became clear that they were planning to continue past Shabbos. A crowd gathered with each side arguing their case. Emotions rose very high. The foreman who was strong, tanned, and in his fifties got off his bulldozer and said to the crowd, he is not going to stop unless he gets a notice in writing from the "top boss" of the moshav that they have to stop. Moshe a quiet man pulled up in front of the crowd. He rolled up his sleeve and everyone gasped because they thought he was about to punch somebody. He quietly said, do you want a notice in writing from the top boss that we have to stop on Shabbos? He then pointed to the number on his arm. Here is a permanent certificate that we are Jews and as Jews we have to live like Jews. Here it is straight from the highest boss. He said it with a powerful mixture of deep pain and deep pride. Suddenly the foreman shouted "I understand exactly what he is saying", he rolled up his sleeves to show a similar number. This is a reminder that we are Jews and should live like Jews. They both hugged in a private secret sense of understanding that only they could understand and the man promised that he will never break Shabbos again.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 165

❖ Orchard Street, on the Lower East Side, was a hubbub of activity on Shabbos, both on Friday nights and Saturdays. The Jewish pushcart peddlers, selling house wares, fruits and vegetables, fish and meat products, line the streets for blocks on end. Papa (Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman) was terribly troubled by this great desecration of the Shabbos and racked his brain on how to prevent it. He advertised in the Yiddish paper for balei batim who were interested in furthering Yiddishkeit in New York City. Several men turned up. After he and a few other men organized the Agudas Balei Battim, Papa and several colleagues from the organization decided to demonstrate against the chillul Shabbos on Orchard Street one Friday afternoon Mama told me to follow Papa and keep an eye on him, as she knew how very rough and tough some of the Orchard Street peddlers could be, and she feared that Papa might be harmed. With Papa at the head, they marched down Orchard Street, stopping at each pushcart and explaining courteously that Shabbos was nearing and it was a great transgression of Jewish religious law to keep their pushcarts open and engage in selling on Shabbos. A very few of the peddlers took these words to heart and closed up, but most of them hurled insults at Papa and the others, and almost bodily pushed them away. Papa did not give up. Each erev Shabbos, he strode down Orchard Street exhorting the peddlers to close their pushcarts, until he became a familiar figure to be ridiculed and assaulted. When the Agudas Balei Batim was able to raise enough funds, Papa was able to say to each peddler, "How much will you earn during the Shabbos? I will give you the full amount if you close up your pushcart right now." This worked. Within a few months, even the diehards capitulated. Papa's initiative and obstinacy closed the pushcarts on Orchard Street, from Canal to Delancey Streets, on Shabbos. Instead, Orchard Street became a walking thoroughfare for people to stroll along on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

All for the Boss, By Ruchoma Shain, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The following story is recorded in the t'shuvos (responsa) of the Maharsham, Rav Sholom Mordechai Szwadron vol 3:225. One Shabbos in the city of Zlotchov where the Maharsham lived, a local resident became very sick. At one point it appeared that their life was in serious danger. A local dayan advised the family to request a non-Jew to write the name of the sick person and their mother's name on a paper and bring the note to the Sar Hashalom, the Belzer Rebbe, who lived in the city of Brod. The hope was that if the Sar Hashalom would pray for this person he would recover. When the news of this story reached Rav Shlomo Kluger, the rov of Brod, he was infuriated and disqualified this dayan of Zlotchov from rendering any halachic decisions. The sanctity of Shabbos was desecrated. When the note arrived at the door of the Belzer Rebbe, he too, was terribly upset that this was done. Nevertheless, he told himself "Once the act was done, albeit wrongly, I must do my best to daven for this sick individual. If I fail to bring about a recovery, this desecration of the Shabbos will occur because of me." The Maharsham who was familiar with the entire story concluded that, in fact, the sick person had a complete recovery.

Table Talk, Edition 441 (Parshas Emor), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Like Reb Shmuel Auerbach's own chesed, his wife's open-heartedness to a fellow Jew simply wasn't subject to the normal constraints of time, place, or resources. A talmid of Reb Shmuel and his wife, childless for many years, would visit the Auerbach home every leil Shabbos; the men sat and spoke in learning at the dining room table as the ladies talked in the living room. Then, the good news arrived that the wife was expecting a child—but it was a high-risk pregnancy, requiring a lengthy hospital stay. When Reb Shmuel inquired as to who would be staying with the wife, since the couple had no relatives nearby, the husband said he would be forced to take a leave of absence from his kollel. Reb Shmuel said it was unthinkable for him to interrupt his learning in that way, but he had an idea: He'd ask the Rebbetzin if she would spend her days with the expectant mother, with the husband taking over only on erev Shabbos, when the kollel was not in session. And so it was. For a month and a half, the Rebbetzin—who was not blessed with children of her own—made two round trips each day to and from Hadassah Hospital for two bedside shifts: one from morning until noon and a second in the late afternoon. It was an hour-long bus ride—so just the time spent in transit totaled four hours daily. And each time she went to the hospital, she brought along bags filled with delicious home-cooked food. Finally, the mother-to-be was discharged and returned home. But as Pesach approached, complications arose in the pregnancy requiring her to be bedridden. Reb Shmuel told the husband not to worry: He and the Rebbetzin would come to their home for the Seder, with the Rebbetzin doing all the cooking. Many years later, at the shivah for the Rebbetzin, this talmid came to be menachem avel. Reb Shmuel motioned to him to sit down near him, and then, turning to everyone present, said: "Lots of people come and tell me vertlach, explaining pesukim in 'Eishes Chayil' and the like, but that's not nichum. One should speak of the middos and deeds of the departed. To relate, for example, what the Rebbetzin did for your wife—that's nichum! Please, tell those who are here the story."

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

❖ When meshulachim came collecting tzedakah, Rav Mordechai Schwab would offer words of encouragement and cheer in addition to giving generously. He was sensitive to their plight of having the unappreciated and humbling job of asking for donations, Toward the end of Rav Mordechai's life, a meshulach from Israel came, who appeared discouraged. Rav Mordechai asked him how the collecting was going. The meshulach responded that it was difficult and complained that people were not giving him money. Rav Mordechai suggested that if he wore a hat and appeared more respectable, he might fare better. He responded that he did not own a hat. Upon hearing this, Rav Mordechai gave him one of his own hats along with lots of encouragement. The Rebbetzin, who was present, later recalled that this meshulach was so ecstatic that he practically danced down the pathway leading from the house to the street, all the time adjusting that hat to a slightly different angle. Rav Mordechai never replaced that hat, which is why he departed from this world leaving only one hat, although previously, he always had two hats, one for Shabbos and one for the weekdays.

From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press

❖ 86 Bachurim from the Kaminetz Yeshivah were sent to Siberia during ww2. They usually worked very hard. But they were very malnourished and were getting very weak. One Shabbos they were asked to gather all fallen sticks of wood to send to a factory to make into wood. The commandant said he would come back in a while. While he was away they wanted to minimize the chillul Shabbos. They decided to do the melacha shanyim shaasua, two would hold a stick, and every four amos they would stop. It was a comical scene, but they were able to minimize the chillul Shabbos. They didn't realize that the commandant was watching them the whole time. He had them arrested. At the barracks they were put on trial for sabotaging the Russian war effort. All of the other Russian workers were called in to the courtroom to watch the scene. The prosecutor reenacted the scene and the whole courtroom roared with laughter. As everyone was laughing a very high ranking communist official walked in. What is all this comedy. How can the workers get up at 5:30 if they are kept up so late with theatrical performances. The prosecutor repeated the accusation to the official. Once again everyone laughed. The official said he would like to interrogate the students privately. The student were terrified. They were alone in the room and the official said "good voch" and spoke to them in Yiddish. He said that he was Jewish although no one else knew it. When his mother died she made him swear that he will use his position to help other Jews. He would try to help them but he asked if they can please explain the reason for their strange actions. They explained him the idea of Shabbos, and shnayim sheasuah. They were surprised that he understood. He appeared to be very inspired about the meaning of Shabbos. The official then told them that his presence in the camp was miraculous because his car broke down and he came in to the hall to request assistance, when he came in during the trial. He brought them back to the courtroom. He asked the commander how the students worked during the rest of the week. "During the week they carry heavy chains. All of a sudden they started acting with no sense. The officer said, "they have not lost their minds, they have just lost their strength. I want you to double their rations and give them more strength. Because of the students commitment to Shabbos, and the increased rations, they were all able to survive the war in Siberia.

Path Through the Ashes, edited by Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 202

❖ Following, are two beautiful anecdotes about Shabbos food. As in most kehillos of the time, there was a central communal oven in Kerestir, Hungary, where local women would place their cholent pots erev Shabbos. On Shabbos day, before the meal, each household dispatched someone to pick up the hot dish. Reb Shaya Kerestir's Rebbetzin knew which pot belonged to which family. Somehow she managed to find a few moments before Shabbos after the pots were all placed in the oven to go over to the communal kitchen. There, without anyone knowing, the Rebbetzin would add potatoes and meat to the cholent of those families who could afford only beans. This way she helped ensure that cholent, the Shabbos staple, would be nourishing and delicious for each and every family in town. Let's jump to contemporary times, to the Shabbos table to the fabled Machlis family. At the Machlis table, the first course on Shabbos was always gefilte fish with an array of salads. At one Friday night seudah, a Sephardic Jew who, as Rabbi Machlis describes, "had never experienced the Ashkenazic cuisine of gefilte fish," got up and demanded in Hebrew, "Who made this? Henny replied simply, "I made this fish." "This is not fish!", the man exclaimed derisively. "This is not the way to make fish. With sugar? With matzah meal? You don't know how to make fish." By that time, Henny had been cooking for a couple of decades and had served thousands of guests. Nevertheless, she replied humbly, "That's true. I don't know how to make fish. Would you like to teach me?" "Yes," the disgruntled guest agreed. "I'll teach you." "When are you going to teach me?" "Thursday morning." The man showed up the following Thursday morning. As he taught her how to make "Moroccan fish", Henny was the perfect student, humbly asking at every step, "What do I do now?" That Shabbos night, the Machlises served both gefilte fish and Moroccan fish. During the first course, the man got up and announced to the guests, "Do you know why there's fish tonight? Because I taught her."

From Reb Shayele, by Rabbi Yisrael Besser, published by Feldheim, and Emunah with Love and Chicken Soup, by Sara Yocheved Rigler, published by Shaar Press

❖ A foreign bochur with a weak background in learning ate with the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Schechter, for Shabbos. The bochur had a hard time grasping the Rashi and the Rosh Hayeshiva devoted most of the seuda to explaining it to him. Afterwards, one of the others complained to the Rosh Hayeshiva that he lost out on this seuda. The Rosh Hayeshiva replied, "Not at all. It was a very successful seuda. I taught one bochur a Rashi. And the others were taught how to treat a Yid."

From Rav Aharon Schechter Tribute / Table Talk Anthology

❖ Rav Mordechai Schwab developed this highly refined level of hakaras hatov to inanimate objects, including his clothing. He did not own much clothing. He only had two suits, one for Shabbos and one for the weekdays. He owned four or five shirts which he wore until they were almost threadbare. When a shirt was in the condition where it could no longer be worn, he would not discard it by simply throwing it away. He would instead first hang it in the closet for approximately two weeks before discarding it to, so to speak, part with it. Then he would fold the shirt, put it in a bag, pat it, and place it in the garbage bin, saying gently, "You have served me well." This sincere and sensitive level of hakaras hatov to inanimate objects can only come from years of training and sensitizing oneself to this quality.

From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press

2. Not to Desecrate Shabbos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 6

As the Torah says, you shall not do any work, etc. (Shemos 20:10, Parshas Yisro)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the definition of work in this verse?
- How many forms of forbidden work are there?
- The Talmud compares violating the Shabbos to idolatry. One is obligated to give ones life up rather than do idolatry. Is Shabbos treated the same? If someone is sick, can they be driven to the hospital on Shabbos if that will violate Shabbos? Can one violate Shabbos to save ones life?
- A derivative of the primary melacha of slaughtering is causing a wound. Is there a difference in terms of severity between the primary melacha and its derivative?
- Why is Shabbos so important?
- If one purposely violates Shabbos, can they be included in a minyan?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Chazal enumerated thirty-nine primary categories of prohibited creative labor (avos melachos), which are taught in the seventh chapter of tractate Shabbos (73a).

For performing any of the primary categories of labor or any of their secondary derivatives (tolados), the intentional violator who received formal forewarning (hasra'ah) is subject to the capital death penalty administered by the court (beis din). If it was committed deliberately without prior forewarning, the punishment is kares (spiritual excision). If it was performed unwittingly (b'shogeg), the transgressor is required to bring a sin offering (chattas).

The halachic distinction between the primary categories (avos) and their derivatives (tolados) relates solely to the number of sacrificial offerings required when multiple labors are performed unwittingly during a single lapse of awareness.

One who deliberately performs activities that are prohibited by rabbinic enactment as a shevus — measures instituted by the Sages as a protective fence around the biblical melachos — incurs rabbinic disciplinary lashes (makas mardus).

We are likewise commanded to prevent our domestic animals and livestock from performing any of these labors (shevisas behemah).

It is forbidden by rabbinic law to instruct a non-Jew to perform labor on Shabbos (amirah l'akum), an injunction likewise categorized as a shevus.

The prohibitions of Shabbos are set aside wherever there is a potential danger to human life (pikuach nefesh), permitting any necessary labor to be performed.

Shabbos observance is equal in spiritual weight to all the mitzvos of the Torah combined, as it serves as the eternal covenantal sign between Hashem and Klal Yisroel.

One who willfully and publicly desecrates the Shabbos is considered in halachic standing like an idolater in every respect.

Conversely, the prophet praises the one who faithfully safeguards Shabbos, as Scripture proclaims: "Praiseworthy is the person who does this... who safeguards Shabbos from desecrating it" (Yeshayahu 56:2).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Shabbos is a reminder that Hashem is the Creator of the world and that we have to therefore fulfill His mitzvos to become G-dlike. In addition, the special ambient kedushah of Shabbos gives us a spiritual recharge that renews us with strength to control our yetzer hara, and listen to our conscience (yetzer tov) in order to become more G-dlike.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Shlomo lived in a small religious community in Israel. Most of the neighbors in his apartment building were religious. The shul they davened in was about a 20-minute walk away from their apartment building. Every erev Shabbos, Shlomo and his apartment neighbors would drive to shul before Shabbos and park at the shul. After Shabbos was over, they would drive home. Shlomo happened to live close to a mall and restaurants so the empty parking space in front of his apartment building was prime parking space. Over time the people in the neighborhood noticed that the parking space in front of that apartment building was empty every Saturday. People sensing that these spots were open every Saturday would park there for a couple of hours, going to a nearby restaurant or mall. Shlomo felt conflicted about letting these people park in his space on Shabbos. On one hand, allowing them to park there helped facilitate the drivers to desecrate the Shabbos. Perhaps every Shabbos he should drape a chain across the space saying "No Parking on Shabbos". But on the other hand, he wondered, perhaps it was best for them to park there. If they did not have an easily acceptable spot, they would have to circle around the neighborhood looking for another spot, and that would

create more chillul Shabbos. Perhaps if they had an easily accessible parking spot, and they could park right away, it would minimize people's chillul Shabbos. Maybe he should keep his spot open for them. Perhaps he should even offer them drinks and snacks on Shabbos to reach out to them. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the parking lot, Rav Zilberstein wrote that he should not allow people to park there on Shabbos. This is because it gives the impression that he doesn't care that Shabbos is being violated.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Bereishis, p. 54 (Table Talk Edition #265 (Parshas Shemos))

Binyamin lived in Bnei Brak and had a last minute simchah to attend in Yerushalayim on Shabbos. Erev Shabbos, he ordered a taxi to take him from Bnei Brak to Yerushalayim. There was only about an hour left before Shabbos and Binyamin knew that he would make it just in the nick of time. After the driver arrived, and they started to drive, Binyamin realized that the driver was a secular Jew based in Bnei Brak. After he dropped Binyamin off in Yerushalayim he would likely continue driving on Shabbos to get back to his "home base". Binyamin wanted to know if it was permitted for him to stay in the taxi to continue his trip to Yerushalayim if there was a good chance that the driver would drive on Shabbos afterwards. On one hand, you can argue that right now it's totally permitted to drive, there should be no problem. In addition, the driver would likely be driving on Shabbos anyway for his next passenger, so maybe it would be permitted. On the other hand, however, Binyamin was causing the driver to drive on Shabbos because he would be driving him away from the city that he was based in. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of driving with a Jewish taxi driver close to Shabbos, if it is clear that the driver will drive back on Shabbos, Rav Zilberstein answered that it would not be permitted because it is a Chilul Hashem. It would convey a lack of respect for Shabbos.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 28

A doctor was in an Israeli hospital on Shabbos. A man came in and thought he was having a heart attack. The doctor checks him and decides that the man is fine, and is just suffering from heartburn. The doctor is frum. If he discharges the man, he will drive home on Shabbos. The doctor wondered if he can keep the man in the hospital for more testing in order that he not break Shabbos. This will result in the government insurance being billed more charges. Can he bill the insurance in order to save this Jew from chillul Shabbos?

Answer: He cannot do so. Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein clarifies that while preventing a fellow Jew from desecrating Shabbos is a noble aspiration, one is strictly forbidden to commit monetary theft (gezel) or submit false insurance claims to achieve a spiritual rescue; the ends do not justify dishonest means.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 77

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Dovid Trenk Zt"l was renowned as a master educator. One Shabbos, a young boy in Camp Munk, the child of one of the division heads, mistakenly turned off a light on Shabbos. The eight-year-old was inconsolable, crying bitter tears at the chillul Shabbos. His parents tried to reassure him that it had been an accident, and he was just a child, it was okay. But the boy was not consoled. Finally, they suggested that they go together to Rabbi Trenk and tell him what happened. Yes, the child agreed, he wanted to do that. He himself told Rabbi Trenk of his "aveirah," how he had accidentally clicked the light switch. "What should I do?" he asked tearfully. "What should you do?" Rabbi Trenk looked down at him. "Kalman," he cried out, "what you should do is you should thank the Eibishter that He made you a human being and He didn't make you a frog or a tree or a chaloptches (stuffed cabbage) - He made you a human being and human beings make mistakes! Say 'Thank

you, Hashem, for making me a human being!' "The boy wiped away his tears, pleased with the answer. Later on, the child looked up at his father, his eyes brimming with clarity and honesty. "Tatty," he said, "I hope I never forget what Rabbi Trenk told me."

From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Kobi was a former yeshivah student who gave up religious life, served in the Israeli army for three years, and then traveled to the Far East to "find himself." Throughout this time, his pintele Yid constantly bothered him about moving away from the observant life he had known. During a visit to Israel, Kobi told Rav Chaim Kanievsky about his experiences. Then he added, "There is no way I am ready to commit to a religious lifestyle, but I have a guilty conscience for not being religious." Rav Chaim's response took him by surprise. "Do you smoke?" he asked. "Yes, I do," replied Kobi. "I would like you to stop smoking on Shabbos," said Rav Chaim. "Absolutely not!" replied the ex-yeshivah bachur. Rav Chaim tried but could not convince him. Finally, he said, "I would very much appreciate it if you stopped smoking on Shabbos completely. However, if you feel unable to do that, at least do the following: When you finish a cigarette, you can either extinguish it or let it burn out by itself. Actively putting out a cigarette with your hands is extinguishing, one of the thirty-nine prohibited melachos that may not be done on Shabbos. Make sure you do not do that. Whenever possible, think of ways to minimize your desecration of Shabbos." Kobi agreed. When he returned to Rav Chaim several months later, a kippah adorned his head. He told Rav Chaim that he had begun to constantly think of ways to minimize his Shabbos desecration - until he was able to keep Shabbos completely!

From Rav Chaim, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO MAKE AN ERUV CHATZEROS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive rabbinic commandment enacted by the Sages to establish an eruv chatzeros (a communal domain partnership through shared food), which permits carrying between private residences and a shared courtyard on Shabbos.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish recounted in the name of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi: Once the townspeople forgot to bring the circumcision knife (izmel) before Shabbos, and they brought it on Shabbos morning for the baby's Bris Milah. The Sages were troubled: how could they set aside the majority ruling of the Sages and act according to the lone opinion of Rabbi Eliezer? Rabbi Oshaya said: 'I went and personally questioned Rabbi Yehudah HaGozer (the Mohel who was there), and he told me: It was an enclosed alleyway (mavoi) in which the residents had not yet joined in a shared Eruv, and they carried the knife only from one end of that alleyway to the other!'

Shabbos 130b

B. NOT TO DO ENGAGING WORK CLOSE TO SHABBOS OR YOM TOV

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 49-2

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How early should one stop doing work?
- Is it always that early? Is it ever earlier?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to perform occupational labor on Erev Shabbos or Erev Yom Tov from the time of Minchah onward. Rashi explains that the time of Minchah referenced here begins after the ninth proportional hour of the day [i.e., Minchah Ketanah]. One who engages in labor during this prohibited time is rebuked and restrained by the court.

On Erev Pesach, this prohibition takes effect earlier, from midday (chatzos), because during the era of the Beis HaMikdash that marked the designated time for slaughtering the Korban Pesach. The restriction on Erev Pesach is far more stringent than on other festival eves, and the rabbinic court is empowered to excommunicate (nidui) or administer disciplinary lashes (makas mardus) to anyone who obstinately refuses to comply.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred involving a gentile who brought fish to Rabban Gamliel on Yom Tov. Rabban Gamliel declared: 'They are halachically permitted, but I do not wish to accept them from him!'—teaching both that the fish were permitted according to the letter of the law under those circumstances, and that a leader may decline a personal gift while explicitly stating the law so others do not mistakenly think the item is forbidden.

Mishnah, Beitzah 3:2

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Manis Mandel was the beloved principal of the Yeshivah Of Brooklyn. In 1969, Rabbi Mandel's in-laws Mr. And Mrs. Pinchas Delman, visited Eretz Yisrael. Sadly, a few days after their arrival in Eretz Yisrael, Mrs. Delman suffered a massive heart attack and passed away shortly thereafter. Before Mrs. Delman died, she instructed her husband to return to the States after the burial for the shivah. His flight took off from Tel Aviv and was due to land in New York minutes before Shabbos. There would not be time to get from the airport to Brooklyn, so the family packed food, cots, and blankets," and headed to Kennedy Airport to spend Shabbos with Mr. Delman. However, as candle-lighting time approached, it was apparent that the plane might touch down on Shabbos, depending on when its pilot would receive clearance to land. Rabbi Mandel phoned Kennedy Airport, explained that he was a rabbi, and asked if it was possible to speak with the air traffic controller to explain the importance of giving the plane clearance to land as soon as possible. Incredibly, the call was put through. Rabbi Mandel proceeded to explain to the air traffic controller about the importance of Shabbos in Orthodox Jewish life and that there was an Orthodox Jew arriving from Israel who was in danger of landing on Shabbos. "Do you know about Shabbos?" Rabbi Mandrel asked the man. The air traffic controller replied, "Of course I know about Shabbos! I'm Jewish, and in fact, as a boy I attended Talmud Torah in Brooklyn where I grew up." Rabbi Mandel asked the man's name and immediately recognized it. He was speaking to one of his old talmidim! Rabbi Mandel's joy at discovering a long-lost talmid was indescribable. The man excitedly told him, "Rabbi, I will make sure that this plane is the first to land." He gave priority clearance to Mr. Delman's plane and it landed before Shabbos.

Table Talk, Edition 298 (Parshas Vaeschanan), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

C. ON SHABBOS, ONE SHOULD NOT MAKE ANY PREPARATION FOR A MELACHAH AFTER SHABBOS

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-25

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must not discuss business affairs or commercial transactions on Shabbos, as Scripture states: "Nor seeking your own needs or speaking of mundane matters" (Yeshayahu 58:13).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The Sages taught in a Braisa: It once happened that a pious man walked through his field on Shabbos, saw a breach in his stone fence, and thought to himself that he would repair it after Shabbos. Immediately he remembered that it was Shabbos, when even planning weekday labor is forbidden. Out of reverence for the holiness of Shabbos, he resolved: 'Since I thought about repairing this breach on Shabbos, I will never repair it at all!' What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do for him? He caused a miraculous caperbush to sprout and grow right inside the breach, sealing the fence naturally and producing abundant capers, buds, and fruit from which that pious man and his entire household were sustained all the days of his life!

Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 150b

D. NOT TO RUN ON SHABBOS

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 50-5

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Is it ever permitted to run on Shabbos?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to take hurried, excessively wide strides on Shabbos. The Rambam writes that it is likewise forbidden to run or leap on Shabbos, as one's demeanor and gait on Shabbos must reflect serenity and honor.

However, for the sake of a mitzvah — such as running to the synagogue (beis knesses), the house of study (beis midrash), or a similar sacred purpose — running is entirely permissible and is even deemed a mitzvah, as Scripture states: "Let us know, let us pursue knowledge to know Hashem" (Hoshea 6:3).

E. NOT TO TALK IDLE TALK ON SHABBOS

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-26

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Would saying hello to someone be considered idle talk?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must not engage in idle talk on Shabbos, as Scripture states: "Nor speaking mundane words" (Yeshayahu 58:13). The Talmud Yerushalmi (Shabbos 15:3) observes that the Sages only reluctantly permitted extending standard personal greetings on Shabbos. Furthermore, the holy Zohar warns that engaging in frivolous, idle conversation on Shabbos constitutes an actual desecration of the sacred day.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Elyah Lopian would expound on the parashas hashavua, on ideas related to Shabbos, and on various Torah concepts Shabbos throughout the Shabbos meal. He explained his special interest in speaking at length in divrei Torah on Shabbos by citing the words of the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen, 1838-1933), with whom he had spent a Shabbos in Radin many years earlier. Our Sages tell us that Shabbos is equivalent in value to the entire Torah. 'We may therefore calculate that every mitzvah one performs on Shabbos is worth 613 times whatever it would have been worth if it had been performed on a weekday. Moreover, the Vilna Gaon tells us that each and every word of Torah that one learns comprises a separate mitzvah. Bearing these two concepts in mind, we may conclude that when one studies Torah on Shabbos, each and every word of Torah learned can earn its doer reward equal to that of 613 mitzvos, for it is multiplied by 613. This being the case, there is no end to the number of mitzvos one can re when studying Torah on Shabbos. This principle is especially important in the months of Elul and Tishrei, the season of teshuvah. When one is searching for ways and means to tilt the scales of Heavenly Judgment in one's favor, involving oneself in Torah study on Shabbos can be most effective.

Reb Elya, By David J. Schlossberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

3. Not to Leave the Techum on Shabbos and Yom Tov

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 7

As the Torah says, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day (Shemos 16:29, Parshas Beshalach).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is meant by "not leaving one's place"? Can one leave their house on Shabbos?
- How far can one walk on Shabbos?
- Is this a Torah law or rabbinic law?
- When we measure the 2000 ama radius, is it a circle, or a square?
- Can one walk more than 2000 amos within a large city like New York?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This scriptural prohibition teaches that if one walks beyond the municipal perimeter of his town even a single cubit past twelve mil — the distance corresponding to the length of the encampment of Klal Yisroel in the wilderness — he violates this mitzvah according to biblical Torah law.

Whoever walks beyond two thousand cubits (amos) outside the municipal boundary of the town (techum Shabbos) is liable to rabbinic disciplinary lashes (makas mardus). This is the authoritative view of the Rif (Rabbeinu Yitzchak Alfasi)

Many other early authorities (Rishonim), however, maintain that even if one walks a great distance of many parasangs (parsas), it remains exclusively a violation of rabbinic law rather than a biblical prohibition.

The two-thousand-cubit boundary is calculated geometrically as a square bounding box surrounding the town, thereby granting the walker the extended distance into the diagonal corners of the square.

It is entirely permissible to walk freely throughout the interior of a city on Shabbos, regardless of how large its metropolitan expanse may be.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Shabbos is a reminder that Hashem created the world and that we have to therefore fulfill Hashem's mitzvos in order to become G-dlike. In addition, the special ambient kedushah of Shabbos gives us a spiritual recharge that renews us with strength to control our yetzer hara, and listen to our conscience (yetzer tov) in order to become more G-dlike. If one would travel on Shabbos it would be very difficult to absorb this influence.

A. TO MAKE AN ERUV TECHUMIN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-9

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic mitzvah that if one needs to travel beyond the standard Shabbos boundary (techum Shabbos) for the sake of a mitzvah, he should first establish an eruv techumin (by depositing food before Shabbos at the boundary) to extend his permissible walking range.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The disciples of Rabbi Zakkai asked him: "In the merit of what practices have you attained such a long life?" He answered them: "In all my days, I have never behaved disrespectfully within four cubits of prayer; I have never called my fellow by an embarrassing nickname; and I have never neglected the sanctification of the Shabbos day. I had an elderly mother, and once when I had no wine for Kiddush on Shabbos, she sold the cap from her own head and brought me wine for Kiddush!" It was taught: When his mother passed away, she left him three hundred barrels of wine, and when Rabbi Zakkai himself passed away, he left his sons three thousand barrels of wine.

Talmud Bavli, Megillah 27b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Even abject poverty and dire circumstances never led Rabbi Shach to diminish the reverence and awe he had for the minutest detail of halachah. The Shulchan Aruch states that one must honor Shabbos with a clean shirt. And so every Thursday night, he would take off his only shirt and wash it on the roof of the beis medrash. Refusing to return downstairs

with only underclothing and tzitzis, he remained in the frigid Lithuanian winter air, waiting for the shirt to dry sufficiently to put it back on, and return to the beis medrash.

Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

4. To Make Kiddush on Friday Night

((Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer HaMitzvos Positive 19

As the Torah says, Remember the Shabbos day, to keep it holy (Shemos 20:8, Parshas Yisro),

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How does one fulfill this mitzvah of remembering the Shabbos day?
- What can be used to make Kiddush?
- What can be used to make havdala?
- Can one eat before making Kiddush in the morning or before havdala?
- How does one take oneg, delight in Shabbos?
- How does one show honor to Shabbos?
- How much should one spend in order to have pleasure on Shabbos, or to honor Shabbos?
- Is one obligated to eat a meal after Shabbos in over to escort it out?
- How much does one have to eat for melaveh malkah?
- Is the mitzvah of remembering Shabbos limited to doing it on Shabbos itself? How else can one fulfill this mitzvah?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Chazal expounded regarding the verse "Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it" (Shemos 20:8) that one must hallow the day with verbal declaration — proclaiming its sanctity upon its arrival through Kiddush, and upon its departure through Havdalah.

By rabbinic enactment, it is an obligation to recite Kiddush:

over a cup of wine;

or alternatively over bread.

Likewise, it is a rabbinic enactment to recite Havdalah upon the departure of Shabbos:

over a cup of wine;

or over an esteemed regional beverage (chamar medinah).

It is strictly forbidden to eat or drink anything prior to reciting Kiddush or Havdalah.

Through the prophetic tradition (Divrei Kabbalah), Klal Yisroel was commanded two additional mitzvos regarding Shabbos:

namely, delight (oneg);

and honor (kavod).

As Scripture states through the prophet: "And you shall call Shabbos a delight, the holy day of Hashem honored" (Yeshayahu 58:13).

One honors Shabbos through tangible physical preparations:

by washing one's face, hands, and feet with warm water prior to Shabbos;

and by attiring oneself in fresh, dignified garments reserved specifically for Shabbos.

One fulfills the delight of Shabbos (oneg Shabbos) by partaking of delectable foods and beverages, accompanied by the mandatory obligation to eat three complete festive meals on Shabbos.

The more one expends to enhance the honor and delight of Shabbos, the more praiseworthy he is, provided it remains within his financial means.

Whoever takes delight in the holy Shabbos is granted:

an uncircumscribed, boundless heritage (nachalah b'li metzarim).

and will be granted his heart's wishes

and he will be saved from the servitude of foreign powers.

It is also a mitzvah to arrange the table for a meal after the departure of the Shabbos, although no more than an olive's amount is necessary for the meal to "escort the Shabbos queen".

Ramban (R. Moses b. Nachman, Nahmanides) wrote that part of this positive commandment of remembering the day is to remember the Shabbos every day of the week.

Therefore, when one mentions the days of the week he is to say "the first day of the Shabbos, the second day of the Shabbos", and so on.

This is also true with other matters. If he chances upon something good, he should designate it for the Shabbos, saying explicitly, "This is for the Shabbos."

This mitzvah is in effect everywhere, at every time, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Shabbos is a reminder that Hashem created the world and that we have to therefore fulfill Hashem's mitzvos in order to become G-dlike. In addition, the special ambient kedushah of Shabbos gives us a spiritual recharge that renews us with strength to control our yetzer hara, and listen to our conscience (yetzer tov) in order to become more G-dlike. Kiddush makes us aware of the message of Shabbos, and helps us to internalize its holiness.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Kiddush makes the day holy for us, because it declares the purpose of the day; Namely, that Shabbos is a reminder that Hashem created the world, and that we are not slaves in Mitzrayim anymore because Hashem took us out.

SEFER HACHINUCH

We use wine for Kiddush because a small amount of wine stimulates our mind and senses so that we can better appreciate the joy of the occasion.

SFAS EMES

• Chazal understand the positive mitzvah of remembrance (zachor) as verbal remembrance (zechirah ba-peh) expressed through speech. The Sfas Emes explains why sacred speech (dibbur) is the appropriate form. In his discussion of "Remember and Guard were spoken in a single utterance" (Zachor ve-Shamor be-dibbur echad), he identifies remembrance (zachor) with the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) implanted within the life of the person, while guarding (shamor) belongs to the external sphere that protects that inner point. He then describes speech as "revealing the inner spiritual power so that all outward conduct is guided by inwardness." Speech is the revelation of the inner power so that external conduct can be directed according to the inner reality. A silent Shabbos can preserve the boundary; Kiddush reveals its inner spiritual essence (penimiyus). Speech becomes the bridge through which the hidden meaning of the day governs its visible observance (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5631).

• The first question is built into the Torah's wording. Why, then, does the Torah tell Israel "Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it"? The Sfas Emes answers that there are different levels of the kedushah of Shabbos. There is a holiness that descends from Hashem and must be guarded, and there is an additional revelation of holiness that depends upon the response of Klal Yisrael. In his discussion of 'Remember' and 'Guard' (Zachor ve-Shamor), he writes that remembrance (zachor) represents the kedushah that Bnei Yisrael must draw into Shabbos, an added holiness (tosefes kedushah) brought through Kiddush and the tefillos of Shabbos. Kiddush expresses the positive half of the covenant: the day must not only be protected from violation but actively received, named, remembered, and sanctified. Shabbos becomes fullest when the kedushah given from above meets the kedushah awakened from below (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5660).

• The Sfas Emes repeatedly calls Shabbos testimony (sahadusa). Creation itself exists as evidence of its Creator, but the physical world cannot consciously state what it means. The heavens move, plants grow, animals live according to their nature, and the forces of the universe operate according to the laws placed within them. Yet none of these creatures can step outside its natural function and declare that the entire system derives its existence from Hashem. Hashem created a world capable of concealing its source, and the Jew becomes the witness who consciously reconnects the visible world to that source. Kiddush is therefore one of the moments each week when the universe, through the mouth of Israel, states what it truly is (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5650).

• The Kiddush blessing concludes by describing Shabbos as a gift Hashem has caused us to inherit "with love and favor" (be-ahavah u-ve-ratzon). The Sfas Emes asks why both expressions are necessary and develops the pair in more than one direction. In Vayigash he explains love (ahavah) as an inward, hidden bond and inner will (ratzon) as the outward movement through which that love becomes expressed. The phrases therefore describe both the inner relationship between Hashem and Israel and the manner in which that relationship becomes revealed through Shabbos. The formulation is especially appropriate to the entire structure of Kiddush. Shabbos contains a hidden love (ahavah) between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. They culminate in the fact that Hashem has given Shabbos to Israel as an enduring form of closeness. Kiddush is the weekly verbal acceptance of that inheritance (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayigash 5652).

• The mitzvah of remembrance (zachor) is not confined to Friday night. The Sfas Emes emphasizes that the most literal arena of remembrance is actually the six weekdays: On Shabbos, the day itself is present. During the week, when Shabbos is absent from immediate experience, the Jew is commanded to keep it before his mind. He connects this to Rashi's explanation of "Six days you shall labor and accomplish all your work": when Shabbos arrives, a person should experience his work as though it is completely finished. The point is to carry within work a consciousness of the source from which its berachah comes. When the week remembers Shabbos, physical activity can remain connected to its shoresh rather than becoming an independent world (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5637).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Discuss why we use wine for Kiddush

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Alyssa and David had two teenage children who lived at home with them. They were beginning to learn more about Torah and Mitzvos and slowly became more Shabbos observant. They were growing but they still had a lot to learn. They were trying to observe Shabbos in its entirety but the children were not fully on board yet. They still went to a secular school and all of their peers were not observant. The children were not yet ready to become Shomer Shabbos. One summer when Shabbos started late, David came home from shul and was ready to make kiddush. The table was set but the children were not there. "They were tired and went to bed early", Alyssa told David. "Should I go upstairs and wake them up?", David asked his wife. "I considered that," Alyssa answered. "It would be wonderful to have them with us for kiddush and for at least part of the meal. But I had the following thought. If we let them sleep they would be not doing any activities that break or desecrate Shabbos. They would not be doing any melachah. If we wake them they may join us for kiddush, but then they will get on their phones, computers and may go out with their friends. Perhaps letting them sleep would be a better way for them to keep Shabbos. "That's a good point", David responded. "You may be right. But perhaps waking them for kiddush would be a more effective way to educate them about the beauty of Shabbos. If they hear kiddush and join us for the meal and zemiros, they may become more inspired to keep Shabbos in the future. If they simply sleep, they may not do melacha, but there is less of a chance that they would be inspired to keep Shabbos in the future. This question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What would be a preferred thing for David and Alyssa to do? Should they let their kids sleep Friday night to ensure that they keep Shabbos by not doing any melacha. Or should they wake them up to join them for the mitzvah deoraisa, Torah mitzvah of kiddush, but may likely do more melachah, forbidden activities, over Shabbos?

Answer: Regarding the question about whether to wake up the teens for Kiddush, Rav Zilberstein answered that they should be woken up to do the mitzvah of Kiddush. We don't know for sure that they will break the Shabbos, and it's possible that the power of this mitzvah may inspire them to keep Shabbos completely.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kamma, p. 218

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ As Shabbos approached each week, the Klausenberger Rebbe did his utmost to obtain two challos in honor of the holy day. Even though he never had enough bread to satisfy his hunger, he had to have two challos over which to recite Kiddush and to eat the Shabbos meal. The Germans distributed daily portions of bread to the prisoners in whole loaves, one loaf for six prisoners. Every evening when they returned from the hard labor, the prisoners stood in line for their loaves of bread,

which they then divided up among themselves. The Rebbe searched for five volunteers each week who would agree to forgo Thursday's loaf and keep it whole until Friday night, when they would get a second loaf. Then they would use both loaves as challah for Shabbos and eat them both. It should be noted, however, that sometimes the Rebbe would notice that one of his five volunteers looked ravenous or very weak. The Rebbe would slice the bread immediately and urge the prisoner to eat it so that he would get stronger, even though it meant that the Rebbe would not have his lechem mishna.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press

A. TO SAY KIDDUSH DURING TEFILLAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Torah employs two distinct formulations of remembrance: in the first Decalogue it states Zachor ("Remember") (Shemos 20:8), and in the second Decalogue it states V'zacharta ("And you shall remember") (Devarim 5:15). This teaches that we are obligated to perform two verbal remembrances — one articulated within prayer (tefillah) and the other recited over a cup of wine — both upon the arrival of Shabbos and upon its departure.

B. TO SAY VAYECHULU BY KIDDUSH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

There is a rabbinic mitzvah to recite the biblical passage of Vayechulu (Bereishis 2:1–3) — testifying to Hashem's creation of heaven and earth — prior to reciting Kiddush on Friday night.

C. TO SAY KIDDUSH DURING THE DAY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-3

SEFER CHAREIDIM

There is a rabbinic mitzvah to recite a blessing over wine prior to the morning meal of Shabbos, a recitation euphemistically termed "the Great Kiddush" (Kiddusha Rabba).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Boruch Brull was the second grade rebbi at Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim for many years. Unfortunately, one year a father of one of his second graders passed away and naturally it was very difficult for this child. As the school year advanced towards Purim, Reb Boruch was concerned how he would teach this child to say the Ma Nishtaneh. Throughout the years he taught his children the Yiddish version with each question beginning with "Tata leibin..." (dear father). However, considering this child and how his seder will be missing a father, he was at a loss. Reb Boruch turned to his Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Yitzchok Feigelstock zt"l from the Long Beach Yeshivah, and presented his dilemma. Reb Yitzchok suggested that he

should teach this child to begin each question with "Mama leibin..." and address his mother. After Purim Rabbi Brull had the opportunity to see Reb Shmuel Kamenetsky. Without wasting an opportunity he presented his dilemma to Reb Shmuel. Reb Shmuel told him that he should teach the child to begin the questions with "Tata leibin..." and tell his second grader that his father will be there and will be listening to him reciting the Ma nishtaneh.

Table Talk, Edition 315 (Parshas Shelach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

D. TO MAKE KIDDUSH ON YOM TOV

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13-6, 39-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Festivals are designated by Scripture as Sabbaths (Shabbasos); consequently, one is obligated to sanctify them both in prayer (tefillah) and over a cup of wine upon their onset and departure, exactly as on Shabbos. Women are fully obligated in both Kiddush and Havdalah equally with men.

E. TO ADD SHABBOS OR A HOLIDAY TO THE WEEKDAY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 17-9

SEFER CHAREIDIM

On every Yom Tov and on Shabbos, it is a biblical mitzvah to extend the sacred day by adding time from the mundane weekday to the holy day (tosefes Shabbos v'Yom Tov), both prior to its onset and after its departure.

F. NOT TO HAVE A MEAL CLOSE TO SHABBOS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-14

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to establish a formal, substantial meal on Erev Shabbos close to nightfall, in order to preserve one's appetite and enter Shabbos with eager anticipation for the evening meal (kavod Shabbos).

G. TO LIGHT SHABBOS CANDLES

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-6

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic mitzvah to light candles before the onset of Shabbos in order to foster domestic tranquility (shalom bayis), enhance the honor of the day (kavod Shabbos), and illuminate the festive meal (oneg Shabbos).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ One Friday afternoon at twilight, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa saw that his daughter was sad. He asked her, 'My daughter, why are you sad?' She answered him, 'I accidentally confused a vessel of vinegar with my vessel of oil, and I kindled the Shabbos lamp from the vinegar!' He said to her, 'My daughter, why does that trouble you? He Who commanded the oil to burn will command the vinegar to burn!' A Tanna taught: That lamp continued burning throughout the entire Shabbos day until they took fire from its flame for Havdalah at the conclusion of Shabbos.

Talmud Bavli, Taanis 25a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A woman who had survived the war in the ghetto and the concentration camps did not keep Shabbos for years afterward. Gradually she reconnected to Torah and mitzvos and started keeping Shabbos once again. She had heard that a person who does not keep Shabbos must light an extra candle every week for each Shabbos she had not lit candles. For this woman, who had not kept Shabbos for years, it would mean over a hundred candles each week. She came to Rav Yisroel Gustman zt"l and asked him what to do. The Rosh Yeshivah told her, "When you light candles each week, give a penny to tzedakah for each week you did not light Shabbos candles." The woman thanked Rav Gustman and left with a happy heart, promising to do as he instructed. His students were puzzled. They asked the Rosh Yeshivah to explain his answer in light of the halachah of lighting an extra candle each week. Rav Gustman replied, "I learned from Reb Chaim Ozer that everything that the Beis Din shel Matah (earthly rabbinical court) rules is accepted by the Beis Din shel Ma'alah when it comes to matters of teshuvah. And it is within my power as a dayan to exercise mercy. Poor woman! After what she suffered in the war, and now she is coming back to the ways of the Torah and keeping the holy Shabbos, am I to make her light over one hundred candles a week, and each time she will feel humiliated, after what she went through?! It is within my power to be merciful. My judgment will be accepted Above." On another occasion, Rav Gustman was approached by a Kohen who had inadvertently killed someone with friendly fire while serving in the army. This man asked if he was allowed to perform the priestly blessing because the halachah prohibits a Kohen who has killed someone b'shogeg (mistakenly) from doing so. Rav Gustman stated various reasons why he not only could do so, but was obligated to continue doing so. But he told his students that the main reason he so ruled was because if he did not, every time the Kohanim were called to come up to recite the priestly blessing, this man would feel tremendous pain as he relived the tragic accident in his mind. It was not permitted to cause that to happen.

From Rav Gustman, by David Page, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Meilech Biderman shared the following true story that took place in the United States several years ago. A Jewish man who had grown up far from Torah and mitzvos was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for a serious crime. While behind bars, he began coming closer to Yiddishkeit. An important Rav visited the prison every two weeks, and the prisoner began learning Torah from him. One of his first decisions was to learn the halachos of Shabbos. The Rav helped him greatly and brought him English books about the laws of Shabbos so that he could continue learning on his own and steadily grow in his new life. One day, the Rav arrived and found the prisoner unusually happy and excited. "What happened?" the Rav asked. The prisoner answered, "I learned in one of the books you brought me that Chazal teach in Maseches Shabbos: 'If Yisrael would keep two Shabbosos, they would immediately be redeemed.' I have decided to keep two Shabbosos properly. After that, I will be redeemed and released from prison! In just a few days, I will be free and able to return home!" The Rav listened with pain. He did not want to disappoint him, but felt he had to explain Chazal correctly. "My dear friend," he said, "I deeply respect everything you are doing. However, Chazal were speaking about the entire Jewish people. They meant that if all of Klal Yisrael kept two Shabbosos properly, the geulah would come and Mashiach would arrive. They were not promising that an individual prisoner would automatically be released. You were sentenced to remain here for fifteen years. Please do not assume that you will certainly be freed after two Shabbosos." But the prisoner remained firm. "It does not say

that Chazal were speaking only about the entire Jewish people," he replied. "I believe their words can also apply to an individual." He remained completely confident that after keeping two Shabbosos, he would be freed. The Rav usually visited every two weeks, but this time he was delayed and did not return for a full month. When he finally arrived, he was shocked to discover that the prisoner was gone. The prison workers told him that the man had been released one week earlier. For several days before his release, he had been telling his friends that he would soon be leaving prison. The Rav began investigating, determined to understand how such an extraordinary thing had happened. The judge who had sentenced the man had grown old and retired. He decided to write his memories of some of the most serious cases he had handled, including this prisoner's trial. The judge reopened the case and carefully reviewed the testimony, arguments, and evidence. As he examined everything again, he realized something terrible: there had been no witnesses and no real proof that the man had committed the crime. The judge was honest enough to admit that he had made a mistake. The authorities reviewed the case, and the Jewish prisoner was set free. Was this man the only Jew who had ever kept two Shabbosos properly? Tens of thousands of Jews keep Shabbos every week. The difference was that this man believed in the words of Chazal with his entire heart and soul. He had no doubt that their promise was true and that his geulah would come. Because his emunah was so strong, he was worthy of experiencing his own personal geulah. The same idea applies to many situations in life. The stronger a person's emunah is, the more worthy he can become of receiving the help, salvation, and yeshuah he needs.

Table Talk, Edition 497 (Parshas Korach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ On that fateful Friday afternoon, Frau Schenirer's last day on earth, one of Frau Schenirer's exceptional students and one of my beloved teachers, Escia Teitelbaum, came to visit her. She set the table for her mentor, covered it with a white tablecloth, and brought out Frau Schenirer's two large candlesticks. Escia was about to leave when Frau Schenirer stopped her: "Escia, before you leave, please bring me the leichters [candlesticks] and two candles. Today I want to light my Shabbos candles early." Escia did as told. From her bedside, Frau Schenirer lit the candles with deep emotion and recited the blessing with great enthusiasm and joy. Seeing the two large candles illuminate her home and the whole world like a pair of torches, she peacefully fell asleep.

Carry Me in Your Heart, By Pearl Benisch, p. 315

❖ Zalman Oran was the minister of education when Ben Gurion was prime minister. Every week his wife would light Shabbos candles and pray that her children would become as great as Ben Gurion, the greatest Jew that she knew. One day Ben Gurion had a meeting with the Chazon Ish and Ben Gurion was very impressed with the Chazon Ish's sensitivity, and profound wisdom. He mentioned this to Zalman Oran and he mentioned this to his wife. Hearing that Ben Gurion was impressed by someone who was even greater than him she began to daven every week that her kids should be as great as the Chazon Ish. Her grandchild became a great Rav in Yerushalayim, R' Baruch Heyman.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Can I please speak to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein?" requested the elderly caller. "Rav Feinstein is very busy right now," his attendant said. "Perhaps I can help you?" "Yes," said the lady. "I would like to know what time licht bentching is this evening." "It's at 6:37. But you don't have to call Reb Moshe with that sort of question. The time is printed on just about every Jewish calendar." "Well, I don't know about calendars. I've been calling to ask the rabbi the time for licht bentching every Erev Shabbos for the past twenty-five years. He never said a word to me about calendars.

Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ A small, nondescript room in the attic above the apartment of the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur) in Yeshivas Sfas Emes served as the Rebbe's haven—the private space where he would learn undisturbed. It was the Rebbe's custom to ensure that Shabbos candles were lit in that room as well. Every Friday, in accordance with the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 264:9; see Rema), the Rebbe would prepare the candles—both in the house and in the attic—by igniting the wicks and then blowing them out. While the Rebbetzin lit the candles in the house, a bachur who helped

around the home was tasked with lighting the candles in the attic. The bachur was extremely devoted and came up with small innovations to save the Rebbe time and effort. For example, he would pull a match halfway out of the matchbox and leave it sticking out so that when the Rebbe prepared the candles, he wouldn't even have to open the box to take out a match. The bachur was puzzled, however. No matter how hard he tried to ease things for the Rebbe, it appeared that the Rebbe didn't use the match that had been prepared! Did the Rebbe specifically not want to use it? He didn't have the temerity to ask, but he wondered. Additionally, he couldn't understand how the Rebbe used a different match yet still left the original one sticking out of the box. Finally, he decided to do a bit of detective work. He made a tiny indentation in the match he left sticking out of the box. To his surprise, he discovered that the Rebbe did use the match he had prepared—it had been burned. Then, after using the match, the Rebbe opened the box, pulled out another match, and left it sticking out. Why? The Rebbe knew that this bachur would be going up to light the candles in the attic, and he wanted to make the job easier for him by pulling out a match in advance!

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

H. TO HEAR A SERMON ON SHABBOS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-15

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to eat a meal during the time the communal rav delivers his public Torah discourse on Shabbos, as every individual is obligated to attend and listen attentively to the public exposition of Torah and halachah.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach abhorred any form of honor. Each year on Shabbos Shuvah and Shabbos HaGadol, he honored Jerusalem's Rav R' Yitzchak Kulitz by attending his derashah (discourse) in Shaarei Chessed's Gra Shul. The first year the drashah was given, R' Shlomo Zalman arrived shortly before the scheduled time and found the shul filled to capacity. As soon as he entered, everyone rose in respect. From then on, he made sure to arrive at least fifteen minutes early, when the shul was relatively empty. Yet he was extremely concerned for the honor of others. One year, a grandchild of his was celebrating a simchah on the Shabbos of R' Kulitz' drashah. R' Shlomo Zalman apologized to his grandchild, but explained that he could not leave Shaarei Chessed that Shabbos. "During the drashah people will notice that my seat is empty, and they will not know that I am away at a simchah. I cannot do something which may slight R' Kulitz' honor..."

5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

I. TO EAT THREE MEALS ON SHABBOS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-3

As it says, "and Moshe said eat today, because today is a Shabbos for Hashem, today you will not find food in the fields" (Shemos 16:25, Parshas Beshalach).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

There is a mandatory mitzvah to eat three meals on Shabbos (shalosh seudos). Chazal expound in the sixteenth chapter of tractate Shabbos (117b) that the word hayom ("today") appears three times in the scriptural passage concerning the manna on Shabbos: "And Moshe said, 'Eat it today, for today is a Shabbos to Hashem; today you will not find it in the field'" (Shemos 16:25). Rashi explains that this threefold repetition of hayom was given specifically to establish the requirement of three meals. From Rashi's commentary, it appears that this obligation constitutes an actual biblical commandment rather than merely a rabbinic enactment supported by a scriptural allusion (asmachta).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Why does the Torah state (Bereishis 2:3), 'And God blessed the seventh day'? Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Rebbi) once hosted the Roman Emperor Antoninus for a meal on Shabbos, and set before him cold Shabbos dishes prepared before the holy day. Antoninus ate them and found them extraordinarily delicious! A few days later, Rebbi hosted Antoninus again for a weekday banquet and served him steaming hot royal delicacies fresh from the stove. To Rebbi's amusement, Antoninus tasted the hot weekday dishes and exclaimed: 'Those cold dishes you served me on Shabbos tasted far more delicious to me than these steaming hot ones!' Rebbi smiled and told him: 'These weekday dishes are missing one special spice!' Antoninus asked in astonishment: 'Does the royal treasury of the Roman Empire lack anything in the world that your kitchen possesses? Tell me what spice it is and my servants will buy it immediately!' Rebbi answered him: 'The spice is called Shabbos! Do you have Shabbos in your treasury? Only one who keeps the Shabbos has the spice of Shabbos!'

Bereishis Rabbah 11:4

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Our Torah Sages were extremely sensitive to the feelings of others. After Rebbetzin Tamar Shteinmen's passing, several Shteinman grandchildren regularly came to sing Shabbos zemiros with R' Aharon Leib Shteinmen on Friday nights. However after seven years of these enjoyable visits; he shocked them with an unexpected request. "I'd prefer if you don't come over to sing anymore," he said. Why? "I'm afraid that Rebbetzin Yisraelzon, upstairs -- whose husband, R' Yosef, passed away last week -- will hear the zemiros and they will bring back warm memories of Shabbos meals with her husband and cause her pain. I prefer to sing the zemiros myself, in a low tone, rather than risk the possibility of causing pain to an almanah (widow)." Only later, after finding out that Rebbetzin Yisraelzon had several of her own grandchildren eating the meal and singing zemiros with her did R' Aharon Leib agree to let his grandchildren continue to enliven his Shabbosos with their niggunim. However, he stipulated that before coming, they should first try to discreetly ascertain that there were Yisraelzon grandchildren upstairs, eating with their widowed grandmother.

Table Talk, Edition 290, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ While Shabbos is primarily a spiritual day it is customary to serve delicious meals and use one's finest dinnerware. Someone asked the Baal Shem Tov whether it was not inconsistent to indulge in gustatory delights on a day that is meant to be spiritual. "Not at all," the Baal Shem Tov said. "There was once a king who had to exile his son for behavior unbecoming a prince. The remorseful son lived in anguish, longing to return to the royal palace. After a period of time, the prince received a message from his father that he was now welcome to return home. The prince's joy was boundless, and he wished to celebrate in song and dance. He knew, however, that people would think him insane if he abruptly began to sing and dance. He therefore threw a party with abundant food and drink. When the guests were in high spirits, they began to sing and dance, and this gave the prince the opportunity to sing and dance without appearing ostentatious. "Everyone was

dancing, but for different reasons. The guests were happy with drink, whereas the prince, who was sober, was rejoicing, because he was to return to the royal palace. "So it is with the Shabbos. The neshamah wishes to exalt in spiritual delights, but it is trapped within a physical body, which may inhibit the neshamah's aspirations. We therefore give the body some physical pleasures, so that it may be happy with its gratification, leaving the neshamah uninhibited in its quest to reach spiritual heights. It is, of course, a serious mistake if one thinks that all there is to Shabbos is the food and relaxation. This must be properly understood as only a way to facilitate the spiritual adventures of Shabbos."

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ Roma Roth was an energetic young woman who was instrumental in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. She was eventually captured and was sent to Majdanek. One night all of the inmates were called for a roll call in the freezing cold. A 16-year-old girl was put on the gallows. She looked beautiful and defiant. She spat at the guards and she was hung. The commandant said she wanted to escape, and this is what happens to one who tries to escape. The Nazi commandant said they have to stay in that position the entire night watching her hang in the wind. It was Friday night. Roma Ross called out to the group. I am inviting you to my Friday night meal. She then in detail described every detail of the Shabbos meal. I hear my father coming home from shul, my mother greets him, he greets the family, Kiddush, challah etc. She tells it the whole night until they were able to go back in the morning. A woman came to her and said thank you for what you have done. We can't thank you enough. You have saved all of our lives tonight.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 276

J. TO HAVE ONEG SHABBOS, PLEASURE ON SHABBOS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

There is a sacred mitzvah derived from the prophetic tradition (Divrei Kabbalah) to delight in Shabbos (oneg Shabbos) by partaking of choice foods, fine beverages, and pleasurable delicacies.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:7)

Aside from not preventing the hashpa of Shabbos by avoiding melacha, we are also commanded to honor this holy hashpa with oneg, kavod, kiddush, and Havdala. All of these things have the purpose of reminding us to guard ourselves to the degree that is fitting in order to absorb this hashpa. It is also to honor the hashpa in two ways.

to honor and cherish this mala because it is a great kurva and dveikus to Hashem.

to honor Hashem who gave us this great gift.

All of the pratim of hilchos Shabbos, correspond to the pratim of how to be mekabel this hashpa.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Yosef-Who-Honors-Shabbos (Yosef Mokir Shabbos) had a very wealthy gentile neighbor in his town. Chaldean astrologers told the neighbor: 'Yosef-Who-Honors-Shabbos will eventually consume all your wealth!' Determined to prevent this, the neighbor sold all his estates, bought a single priceless pearl with the proceeds, sewed it into the lining of his hat,

and boarded a ferry. A gust of wind blew his hat into the river, and a large fish swallowed it. On Friday afternoon before twilight, fishermen hauled up that fish and asked: 'Who will buy such a big fish at this late hour?' People answered: 'Bring it to Yosef-Who-Honors-Shabbos, for he always buys the finest fish for Shabbos!' Yosef bought it, cut it open to prepare it for Shabbos, and found the priceless jewel inside. An elder met him and declared: 'He who lends to the Shabbos, the Shabbos repays him!' The Gemara continues with Rabbi Chiya bar Abba dining at a golden table in Laodicea earned by saving every choice cut for Shabbos, and Caesar asking Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah: 'Why does your Shabbos food have such a heavenly aroma?' Rabbi Yehoshua replied: 'We have a special spice called Shabbos that we put into it—and it works only for those who keep Shabbos!'

Shabbos 119a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A wealthy man had two sons who lived in a distant city. The first was a rich merchant like his father, while the second was a destitute pauper. It had been many years since the two brothers had last seen their father. One day, the wealthy son received a letter from his father stating that their youngest brother was getting married. He therefore requested that his sons join them for the wedding. "However, I have a request to make of you," wrote the father. "Do not be frugal in the slightest; rather, purchase lavish attire in my honor, and come celebrate this joyous wedding with us. You needn't worry — I will cover all of the expenses." Heeding his father's request, the wealthy son, wife and children all bought beautiful silk clothing, befitting individuals of their stature. When the day of the wedding arrived, he ordered a magnificent coach to transport them to the celebration. Prior to setting out, he sent for his impoverished brother ordering him to rush to his house. The poor brother arrived wearing clothing that was tattered and torn. He wondered why he had been summoned. "Ascend the coach quickly," urged the wealthy brother. "There is no time for explanations. We are going to travel to our father in order to participate in the wedding of our youngest brother." When news of his sons' imminent arrival reached the father's house, he and his household, as well as his mechanchim and all of his servants, went out to greet them. Adding to the festive atmosphere was a band of musicians, who marched in front of them, playing pleasant and joyous melodies. When the coach arrived, the wealthy son and his family — dressed ever so elegantly — descended from the coach, only to be followed by the poor brother who was barefoot and wearing rags. "Who is this man?" whispered the shocked townspeople. The more perceptive of the bunch were quick to answer, "Don't you recognize him?" they said. "He is the man's second son." The wedding was held in grand style, and after seven days of feasting, the wealthy son approached his father in order to bid him farewell. "Go in peace," said the father. "May Hashem ensure you a safe journey." "But father," asked the son audaciously, "what about the expenses that you promised to cover?" "Look carefully at what it says in the letter that I sent you," responded the father. "I guaranteed to compensate you on condition that you purchased beautiful clothing in my honor... Yet you did nothing whatsoever to honor me!" exclaimed the father. "All of the money you spent was solely to enhance your own honor! For if you were truly concerned with my honor, you would have made sure that your brother was dressed appropriately as well. Just look at the humiliation you've caused me by allowing my son to arrive barefoot and shabbily dressed!" A person should therefore try his utmost to honor and enjoy the Shabbos. But how can it be that a person could sit in his home, dressed in elegant attire and partaking of scrumptious delights, while his unfortunate brother sits in his home like a mourner, eating nothing more than seeds? Sadly, this is an indication that the money he spent on his Shabbos delicacies was not for the purpose of delighting in Hashem, but rather, simply to indulge himself! Hashem does not guarantee to reimburse such expenditures.

Jewish Parables - A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ On Shabbos, we eat delicious foods in honor of the Shabbos. When Rav Avigdor Miller would eat the Shabbos food, he would compliment his wife and praise each dish as if it was the first time he had ever tasted it. But, when he did it, it never sounded habitual. For example, he would praise the challah for its aesthetic design as well as for its taste. He had a selection

of warm accolades that he would say to his wife. He would say: "The challah is a masterpiece. It is so beautiful, and it should be showcased." "It is a shame to cut it." "Oisnam gut [exceptionally good].' "A-1." "The challah was wunderbar [amazing]." "It has a geshmaker taam Gan Eden [a delicious sample of the delights of Garden of Eden]." "The Challah is mamash vi der maan [the challah is simply like the manna.]." Rav Miller didn't just thank her in general but for each specific thing. For example, he would say, "Here we have potatoes and parsnip! And leek! Look at the lima beans. And each one is a delicacy." A grandson once observed the Rebbetzin's pleasure in the way Rabbi Miller delineated every item in the vegetable soup, thanking her for each in excitement.

From Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and Revolution, By Yaakov Y. Hamburger, Published by Judaica Press

❖ The Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum) always davened Minchah late, up to sixty minutes after sunset. When Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin questioned this practice, the Rebbe replied, "It is worth davening Minchah late to publicize the fact that it is halachically still considered day, so that people should not work on Motzaei Shabbos at that time. The Rebbe once said to Reb Michael Ber Weissmandl, "The halachah is like Rabbeinu Tam that it's still daytime until seventy-two minutes after sunset, although it looks very dark. From this we can take encouragement even when there is darkness in the world and only a little light, a little light dispels a lot of darkness.

The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 367

5. To Make Havdalah After Shabbos

((Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer HaMitzvos Positive 19 Sefer Chareidim 13-3

As the Torah says, Remember the Shabbos day, to keep it holy (Shemos 20:8, Parshas Yisro).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What beverage can we use for havdala? Can we use beer? Does it have to be wine?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Chazal expounded regarding the verse "Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it" (Shemos 20:8): "Hallow it with words — upon its arrival with Kiddush (the declaration of sanctification), and upon its departure with Havdalah (the declaration of distinction)." By rabbinic enactment, Kiddush must be recited over wine or bread, and Havdalah must likewise be recited upon the conclusion of Shabbos over a cup of wine or an esteemed regional beverage (chamar medinah). It is strictly forbidden to eat or drink anything prior to reciting Kiddush or Havdalah.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH — CHOREV

The purpose of havdala is to express that the purpose of Shabbos is to sanctify the rest of the six days, just as the light enlightens the darkness, Jewish people enlighten the nations, and the holy sanctifies the mundane.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In a shmuess, Rav Pam related the following: There is a dispute among poskim (halachic authorities) as to which a comes first on Motza'ei Shabbos of Chanukah: Havdalah or the kindling of the menorah. Rav Pam followed the opinion that the kindling of the menorah is first. When his oldest child, Aharon, was five years old, he was given his own Chanukah menorah to light. On Motza'ei Shabbos, when Aharon saw his father preparing to kindle his menorah before Havdalah, he blurted out, "I don't care what you do, I'm not lighting my menorah before Havdalah!" Rather than become incensed at his child's apparent brazenness, Rav Pam perceived what was troubling him: he could not comprehend how one can strike a match and kindle a flame before reciting Havdalah over a cup of wine. Wasn't it still Shabbos?" Rav Pam was concerned that no matter how well he would explain his actions, his son would be left with a lessened appreciation for the severity of chillul (desecration of) Shabbos. With this in mind, he told his son, "From now on, we will do it your way" and he proceeded to recite Havdalah before kindling the menorah.

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO MAKE HAVDALAH ON FIRE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13-10

As it says "Hashem saw that the fire (light) was good and Hashem separated (havdala)" (Bereishis 1:4)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a mitzvah to recite the blessing over the light of fire during Havdalah on Motzei Shabbos. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachos 8:5) derives this from the creation narrative, where Scripture states: "And God saw that the light was good, and God separated" (Bereishis 1:4) — linking the creation of radiant light with the act of separation (havdalah).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Chaim Ozer's psak (decision) often reflected a concern far beyond the immediate question posed. He was known to use an electric bulb in place of a havdalah candle; "people think that electricity is not a fire, and thus they permit themselves to put on electric lights on Shabbos," he explained. "So I make a point of saying the blessing 'Borei me'orei ha'eish — He created the lights of the fire' on an electric bulb to demonstrate that electricity is, indeed, a fire."

The Torah Personality, By Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Published by Mesorah Publications

B. TO SAY HAVDALAH DURING TEFILLAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13-5

As it says, "And you shall remember..." (Devarim 5:15, Parshas Va'eschanan)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Torah employs two distinct formulations of remembrance: in the first Decalogue it states Zachor ("Remember") (Shemos 20:8), and in the second Decalogue it states V'zacharta ("And you shall remember") (Devarim 5:15). This requires us to fulfill two verbal remembrances — one articulated within prayer (tefillah, reciting Atah Chonantanu) and the other recited over a cup of wine — both upon the arrival of Shabbos and upon its departure through Havdalah.

C. TO MAKE HAVDALAH ON YOM TOV

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The biblical Festivals are designated as Sabbaths (Shabbasos); therefore, one is required to sanctify and commemorate them both within prayer (tefillah) and over a cup of wine, both upon their arrival through Kiddush and upon their conclusion through Havdalah, exactly as is done on Shabbos.

D. TO EAT MELAVE MALKA

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-1

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Does one have to eat a large meal?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should set his table with dignity on Motzei Shabbos and partake of at least a kezayis of food for the meal of Melaveh Malkah, in order to honor and escort the departed Shabbos Queen.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In Parshas Toldos (5649), the Sfas Emes examines Rashi's comment on Yitzchak's blessing (“May God give you—He will give and give again, both the blessings and their companions”)—which forms the basis for the treasured custom of reciting Veyiten Lecha as we escort the Shabbos at Motzaei Shabbos. A supernal gift from the King's treasury (matanah tovah b'veis ginzai) does more than enrich the moment in which it is received; it simultaneously paves the road (kibush ha-derech) to receive the next revelation. By honoring the departing Queen through the Melaveh Malkah meal and songs of praise, a Jew draws the overflowing grace of the Shabbos that has just ended into the six weekdays, ensuring that weekday labor itself becomes the bridge leading directly to the coming Shabbos (yiten v'yachzor v'yiten) (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Toldos 5649).

• The Sfas Emes identifies three dimensions celebrated through Shabbos: remembrance of Creation, remembrance of the Exodus, and the holiness of the day bestowed upon Klal Yisrael. He connects these with the three Avos and with the three meals of Shabbos. The familiar elements of Shabbos already give a person access to important revealed dimensions of its sanctity. Yet a fourth dimension remains beyond complete present expression: Shabbos points toward the day that will be entirely Shabbos in the future. Introducing his insight with the modest phrase "and it may be explained" (ve-yitachein), the Sfas Emes proposes that the meal after Shabbos alludes to the still-concealed illumination of the future. The Sfas Emes's distinction between revealed reasons for Shabbos and its hidden essence also explains why this meal falls after its departure. It gestures toward a holiness that cannot yet be fully contained by the ordinary schedule of the present week (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Bereishis 5651).

• In Parshas Vayera (5648), the Sfas Emes reflects on the verse recited as Shabbos departs: "May the pleasantness of Hashem our God be upon us; establish the work of our hands for us; O establish the work of our hands!" Escorting the Shabbos at its threshold unites three distinct spiritual rungs: first, noam Hashem aleinu—the hidden supernal pleasantness of Shabbos that shines above human effort; second, ma'aseh yadeinu konenah aleinu—the awakening of human devotion as we re-enter the realm of action; and third, u'ma'aseh yadeinu koneneihu—the permanent imprint of holiness that endures within our physical deeds and sustenance throughout the week (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeira 5648).

E. TO MENTION SHABBOS DURING THE WEEK

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-33

As it says, "remember the Shabbos to make it holy", (Shemos 20:8, Parshas Yisro).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

In the second set of Tablets, it is written: "Safeguard the Shabbos day to sanctify it" (Devarim 5:12). In the first set of Tablets, it is written: "Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it" (Shemos 20:8). Our Sages taught that the commands zachor ("remember") and shamor ("safeguard") were proclaimed simultaneously in a single divine utterance (bedibur echad). The Ramban explains that from the expression "to sanctify it," Chazal derived one of the fundamental positive commandments among the 613 mitzvos: the mitzvah to sanctify the day through Kiddush upon the arrival of Shabbos.

The primary meaning of the verse, however, extends to remembering Shabbos throughout all six weekdays. We are commanded to recall Shabbos continually with both heart and mouth, firmly establishing our enduring belief in Hashem's creation of the world from nothingness (yesh me'ayin). For this reason, one should never cease mentioning Shabbos. When counting the days of the week, we should not name them after secular or pagan designations such as Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Rather, we should designate them in direct relation to Shabbos: "the first day of the Shabbos week," "the second day of the Shabbos week," "the third day of the Shabbos week," and so on, keeping its sanctity ever present before us.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ At the Water-Drawing Celebration (Simchas Beis HaSho'evah) in the Temple courtyard on Sukkos, the pious and men of action would dance with flaming torches in their hands, singing praises: the righteous sang 'Happy is our youth that has not shamed our old age!' and the penitents sang 'Happy is our old age that has atoned for our youth!' When Hillel the Elder saw people rejoicing with levity, he said to them: 'While we are here, Who is here? Does the Holy One need our praises when myriad angels praise Him? Rather, If I am here, everyone is here; and if I am not here, who is here?' And an incident occurred with Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who used to juggle eight flaming torches in the air so swiftly that none ever touched another, and when he bowed in prostration he would plant his thumbs on the marble floor, bend and kiss the stones, and spring back up immediately—a feat no other person could replicate!

Tosefta, Sukkah 4:2–3 (and Talmud Bavli, Sukkah 53a)

❖ When Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar came out of their cave after twelve years of hiding from the Romans (where a miraculous carob tree and spring sustained them), they initially struggled to bear seeing people engaged in ordinary worldly work, until a Heavenly Voice sent them back into the cave for a thirteenth year. When they emerged after the thirteenth year, Rabbi Elazar's gaze still burned, while Rabbi Shimon's gaze healed. Toward sunset on Friday afternoon (Erev Shabbos) at twilight, they saw an elderly Jew hurrying down the road holding two bundles of fragrant myrtle branches (hadassim) in his hands. They called out to him: 'What are these two bundles for?' The old man replied: 'They are to honor the Shabbos!' They asked him: 'Wouldn't one bundle of myrtle be enough for you?' The old man answered joyfully: 'No! One bundle is corresponding to Zachor (Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it), and one bundle is corresponding to Shamor (Guard the Shabbos day)!' Immediately Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai turned to his son Rabbi Elazar and said: 'See how deeply cherished a mitzvah is to the Jewish people!' And right then, their minds were completely calmed and at peace with the world.

Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 33b (66:6–8)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Approximately 15 years before Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky's petirah, a frequent guest at the Kanievsky home purchased an expensive necklace and asked R' Chaim to give it to the Rebbetzin as a Yom Tov gift. The Rebbetzin refused to even open the box. R' Chaim told her that she deserved it for all the sacrifices she had made for his learning. The Rebbetzin responded, "The gifts you give me that I enjoy are the siyumim that you make all year round, especially the Siyum HaTorah on Erev Pesach. Please give the necklace to someone else." She remained steadfast in her refusal to accept the gift, and R' Chaim finally gave the necklace to one of his daughters.

Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Each year before the Yom Tov of Pesach, a generous supporter of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem, Mr. Louis M. Friedman, would purchase new outfits for the yeshivah's needy students. At that time, a large truck would pull up in front of the yeshivah building, loaded with new suits, shirts, shoes, ties, tzitzis, etc. to brighten the Yom Tov for some one hundred students. 'One year, to honor Mr. Friedman for his generosity, the school administration organized an assembly which was to be followed by a dinner in the lunchroom. The assembly room was filled to capacity. To the left sat the needy students who had received the new outfits, women sat in a separate section to the right, while the center was filled with members of the Board of Directors, parents and other invited guests. The president of the yeshivah spoke glowingly of Mr. Friedman and his charitable acts, especially his purchase of the clothing. Before ending, the president turned to the boys and suggested that they show their appreciation for Mr. Friedman by rising in his honor. The boys looked at each other sheepishly, embarrassed to stand up in front of so many people and thereby acknowledge their poverty. Their embarrassment lasted for but a moment. Sensing the students' discomfort, Rav Moshe Feinstein instantly stood up. Some

men, seeing the Rosh Yeshivah stand up, stood up as well. The Board of Directors stood up. The women stood up. Everyone else stood up. The boys, now having nothing to feel ashamed of, also stood up. A modest man, Mr. Friedman felt embarrassed at being the only one left sitting. He too stood up, giving the impression that everyone had risen in honor of some other Mr. Friedman.

5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Mendel Kaplan taught that each Yom Tov is capable of leaving a lasting effect on the entire year to come; Someone once asked Rebbe during Pesach, "How is your Pesach?" He answered, "I won't be able to tell you that until next year. All I can tell you now is how last Pesach was."

Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

SHALOSH REGALIM: THE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to observing and celebrating the holidays, the days that fill us with holiness and inspire us with their sanctifying messages.

6. To Rejoice on Yom Tov

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 21

As the Torah says, and you shall rejoice in your Festival (Devarim 16:14, Parshas Re'eh)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- During the time of the Beis HaMikdash, how did they fulfill this mitzvah?
- Were women obligated in participating in this offering?
- How do we observe this mitzvah today?
- How is it observed for men?
- For women?
- For children?
- For poor people?
- Which one of these groups are the most important?
- When the Torah commands us to have simchah on the Yom Tov through physical means, is there a limit to how much time we should spend on this simchah?
- Is the mitzvah of having simchah limited to the holidays?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

When the Beis HaMikdash stood, festival rejoicing was primarily fulfilled by offering dedicated peace-offerings of celebration (shalmei simchah) in addition to the standard festival offerings (shalmei chagigah). Women were likewise obligated in this sacred joy.

In the post-Temple era, however, this festival joy is fulfilled through concrete physical expressions:

Partaking of festive meals centered on meat and wine.

A husband is obligated to gladden his wife by purchasing fine clothing and jewelry according to his financial means.

A parent must gladden the young children and household members by distributing roasted nuts, fruits, and sweet treats.

Above all, one is obligated to gladden the destitute, the orphan, the widow, and the convert, providing them with the means to celebrate.

If one locks his doors and feasts only with his own family while neglecting the needy, his celebration is not the sacred rejoicing of a mitzvah, but merely the base indulgence of his stomach. Of such self-absorbed feasting, Scripture severely rebukes: "And I will spread dung upon your faces, the very dung of your festival offerings" (Malachi 2:3).

Although eating and drinking on Yom Tov fulfill an active positive commandment, one must not spend lengthy hours indulging in wine, frivolous games, and empty laughter, for that is reckless foolishness and degradation. We were commanded to experience a joy that elevates our service of Hashem, and it is impossible to serve the Creator through unbridled levity, drunkenness, and coarse amusement — only through the dignified, elevated joy of a mitzvah.

Indeed, the genuine joy that a person experiences while fulfilling any mitzvah represents one of the highest forms of divine service (avodas Hashem).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of the Shalosh Regalim teach a unique lesson that helps to inspire us to become G-dly, and well as give us the kedushah to achieve that goal. When we celebrate and rejoice over the ideas behind each Yom Tov, that helps us to absorb its influence.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 488)

This mitzvah teaches us to celebrate and rejoice for the ideas and events behind every Yom tov.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:43)

Celebrating and having joy on the holidays has the effect of creating unity and camaraderie among Jews.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:7)

Aside from a hashpa of kedushah on each Yom tov, each Yom tov has its own unique ohr that is mashpia. With every tikun and ohr that Hashem made when the event first occurred, when that time returns then we enter that same light and the result is that tikun will be renewed.

All of the mitzvos of zecher Yetzias Mitzraim are based on that idea. Because there was a hashpa that gave us a great tikun then, so when that cycle returns again we get that same ohr and the tikun gets renewed. That is the reason why we have to do all of the mitzvos of zecher Yetzias Mitzraim. We do it to absorb the ohr and renew its tikkun. When you appreciate and have simchah about the hashpah, it impacts you much more.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes gives a remarkably concise definition of genuine joy: "true joy is attained when we cleave to the Supernal Root." The essence of simchah is the ability to attach oneself to the higher root. This statement changes the entire way the mitzvah is understood. Joy does not begin with entertainment, comfort, or abundance. It begins with cleaving to Hashem (dveikus). Every created being has a shoresh, a Divine source from which its life continuously flows. A person may properly rejoice in food, family, beautiful clothing, and the gifts of the festival, but the inner life of all those pleasures is the rediscovered connection to their Source. Simchas Yom Tov is the delight of returning to the shoresh from which life receives its meaning (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5655).

• The Sfas Emes frequently uses the phrase "Sabbaths for rest and festivals for joy." Shabbos and Yom Tov both bring kedushah into time, but they reveal it in different ways. Shabbos is connected with serene inward rest (menuchah). Chazal describe Shabbos as a precious gift kept "in My hidden treasury" (be-veis ginzi), and as a day given with an element of modest privacy (tzin'a). On the festivals a higher illumination becomes revealed openly; therefore they are days of joy. The distinction helps explain why the physical and communal dimensions of Yom Tov are so prominent. The festival is a time when Hashem allows the spiritual root of reality to shine more openly within ordinary existence, and the Jew responds by opening himself to that revelation (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5655).

• The Sfas Emes develops another distinction between Shabbos, whose sanctity is fixed by Heaven from Creation, and Yom Tov, whose calendar depends upon the court's sanctification of the new moon. He explains that this human participation creates a distinctive simchah. The Moadim are attained by Bnei Yisrael themselves, and therefore there is a particular joy in the regalim. He associates this with the principle that a person does not experience the same satisfaction from something entirely unearned. When the receiver participates in bringing the gift into actuality, he can receive it with a deeper sense of ownership and dignity. The Jew does not stand entirely outside sacred time as a passive recipient. Klal Yisrael is given a place within the process by which the kedushah of the Moadim becomes manifest (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5660).

• The Sfas Emes develops a remarkable relationship between simchah and yirah. He uses the formulations "my joy from within my awe" (simchasi mi-toch yir'asi) and "my awe from within my joy" (yir'asi mi-toch simchasi). There are times when yirah comes first. A person begins by controlling himself, recognizing Hashem's authority, and restraining the impulses of the body. From that yirah he eventually arrives at joy. There is also a higher movement in which simchah itself gives birth to yirah. The highest simchah and the highest yirah strengthen one another. A person who truly rejoices before Hashem (lifnei Hashem) becomes more sensitive to the greatness of the Divine Presence before which he rejoices (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5661).

• The joy of "And you shall rejoice on your festival" (ve-samachta be-chagecha) includes rejoicing in the mitzvos of the festival that Hashem has given us. This is an important definition of the object of Simchas Yom Tov. The festival is itself a gift. Hashem has placed special days within the year when the Jew is invited into a different spiritual environment. Pesach brings the mitzvos of matzah and Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim. Shavuos renews Matan Torah. Sukkos brings sukkah, lulav, and the extraordinary kedushah of the days following Yom Kippur. The Jew is happy because he possesses Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos, because he has been commanded to perform their mitzvos, and because through those mitzvos he can receive a kedushah unavailable in the same form during ordinary time (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5655).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss how celebrating a Yom Tov is different than celebrating July 4th. July 4th is a commemoration of a historical event. A Yom Tov is not just a commemoration of a historical event, but an experience of tapping into the same energy and kedushah that was present during that historical event.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

In a European village, half the community adhered to the stringencies of Chasidic ritual slaughter (shechitah), while the other half adhered to Lithuanian standards, with neither group consuming the meat of the other. On Yom Tov, the communal beef supply prepared prior to the holiday proved insufficient for one faction. May the community slaughter and prepare an additional kosher cow on Yom Tov specifically to ensure peace, unity, and communal simchas Yom Tov?

Answer: They can shecht and cook a new cow on Yom Tov because it's a disgrace to be split.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 437

The Berger family were very happy, but finances were quite tight. One year before Pesach, Yanky Berger told his wife Esther that he set aside 200 dollars to buy her a new outfit for Yom Tov. "Esther, I know it's a stretch for us, but it's a mitzvah to do this and I really want to make you happy." When Mrs Berger heard this, she was extremely gratified but responded as follows. "Yanky, I'm so touched that you want to buy me an outfit for Yom Tov. But if you want to give me true simchah, I will get much more simchah from something else. You haven't bought a new Shabbos suit in many years. I would love for you to use the money to buy yourself a new suit. That will give me more simchah than a new outfit for me." Yanky was very touched by his wife's words but he wondered if he could fulfil the mitzvah of simchas haregel that way. The mitzvah was to give his wife simchah by buying her new clothing. Could he fulfill the mitzvah by giving her the simchah of buying clothing for himself? On one hand he is still giving her simchah through clothing. But on the other hand perhaps the clothing must be for her. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about buying a suit for himself to give his wife simchas haregel, Rav Zilberstein answered that the halachah requires giving simchah with a physical item. In this case the pleasure he would give her is an emotional pleasure and not a physical one so he could not fulfill the mitzvah by buying himself a suit.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 124

In many countries, poultry eggs are stamped with automated ink identifying the farm of origin. When boiling these eggs in water on Yom Tov, the heat dissolves and erases the stamped lettering. Does boiling stamped eggs on Yom Tov violate the biblical or rabbinic prohibition against erasing text (mochek)?

Answer: It is permitted, because it is a grama.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 426

A wealthy investor living in New York learned on Yom Tov that a catastrophic regulatory event was about to cause his major stock holdings to plunge to zero, threatening him with total bankruptcy. May he instruct a non-Jewish broker to liquidate his stock positions on Yom Tov to prevent financial ruin?

Answer: He is allowed to do so.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 129

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once, the Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yoel Teitelbaum) asked his attendant to send a sum of money to a certain individual to cover his Yom Tov expenses. Someone protested that the man already had money for Yom Tov, the Rebbe said, "Send him more, so that he should know that he has money for after Yom Tov. Then he will do a better job fulfilling the-mitzvah of rejoicing on 'Yom Tov!"

The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 203

❖ Rav Gustman was acutely sensitive to small things that make a big difference. When offered a ride in another person's vehicle, he would choose to sit in the back seat with his "Missis" rather than in the front seat. And when the driver's wife was present, he would insist that the wife sit in front next to her husband. By way of explanation, he would state, "One does not separate bein hadveikim, between those who are closely united, i.e., between husband and wife." Once, when a student came to him about whether to buy a particularly mehudur esrog for Succos, R' Gustman told him it was so mehudur that it was too expensive. Instead, counselled the Rosh Yeshivah, the talmid should use the money he would save by not purchasing the mehudur esrog to buy his wife a new dress for the holiday. A wife's happiness, the Rosh Yeshivah explained, is an essential element of Simchas Yom Tov.

Rav Gustman, by David Page, published by ArtScroll Mesorah (Table Talk, Edition 095, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner)

A. TO SAY HALLEL ON A YOM TOV

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13-13

As it says "He is your praise, and he is your G-d" (Devarim 10:21, Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive commandment to recite the complete Hallel on designated festive occasions, as Scripture states: "He is your praise, and He is your God" (Devarim 10:21). The Ramban explains that this obligation is an essential branch of the biblical commandment to rejoice on the festivals (simchas Yom Tov); out of the overflowing spiritual joy and gratitude inspired by the sanctity of the day, one is obligated to burst forth in song and sing Hashem's praises.

B. NOT TO GIVE A EULOGY ON A FESTIVAL

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13-11, 14-4, 47-27

As it says, "You shall be joyous on your holidays" (Devarim 16:14, Parshas Re'eh)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture commands: "You shall rejoice on your festival" (Devarim 16:14). From this verse, Chazal derived that throughout all seven days of Pesach, all eight days of Succos (including Shemini Atzeres), and on all other Yomim Tovim, it is strictly forbidden to deliver a eulogy (hesped) or engage in public mourning.

C. TO STUDY THE LAWS OF THE FESTIVAL DURING THE FESTIVAL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-6

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Moshe Rabbeinu instituted a permanent enactment for Klal Yisroel that they must inquire into and expound upon the specific laws of each festival as it arrives: the halachos of Pesach on Pesach, the halachos of Shavuos on Shavuos, and the halachos of Succos on Succos.

D. TO VISIT YOUR TORAH TEACHER DURING THE FESTIVAL

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-10

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person is obligated to greet the countenance of his Rebbe on the festival, as Scripture records: "Why are you going to him today? It is neither Rosh Chodesh nor Shabbos" (Melachim II 4:23). This demonstrates that on Rosh Chodesh, Shabbos, and Yom Tov, one has an obligation to visit and receive the presence of one's master in Torah.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ And what is the meaning of the Mishnah: "Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it, and do not budge from it, for you have no better measure than it; Ben Hei Hei says: According to the effort is the reward" (Avos 5:22–23)? There was once an incident with a Jerusalem donkey-driver who came to Hillel the Elder and boasted to him: "Rabbi, see how much better off we are than you! For you have to trouble yourselves along this long, exhausting journey to travel up from Babylonia to Jerusalem, whereas I step right out the door of my house and lodge at the entrance of Jerusalem!" Hillel remained silent and waited a while until the donkey-driver was looking to hire out his donkey. Then Hillel asked him: "For how much will you rent me your donkey to ride from here to Emmaus?" He answered him: "For one dinar." Hillel asked: "And up to Lod, which is farther—for how much?" He answered him: "For two dinars." Hillel asked: "And up to Caesarea, which is farther still—for how much?" He answered him: "For three dinars." Hillel said to him: "I see that the more I lengthen the distance of the journey, the more you increase the payment!" The donkey-driver said to him: "Of course! The payment is always according to the length and effort of the journey." Hillel smiled and said to him: "Should the reward of my own two feet walking to fulfill Hashem's Torah be any less than the hire of an animal's feet?!" Thus Hillel fulfilled the teaching: "According to the effort is the reward."

Avos DeRabbi Nasan, Recension B, Chapter 27:11

E. TO MAKE AN ERUV TAVSHILIN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-10

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to establish an eruv tavshilin on the eve of a Yom Tov that immediately precedes Shabbos, setting aside prepared cooked food in advance to halachically permit cooking and baking on Yom Tov for the needs of Shabbos.

PESACH: THE FESTIVAL OF REDEMPTION

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to observing Pesach, a holiday that reminds us of the foundational principles of our belief, and fills us with a sanctifying influence that liberates us from our material impulses.

7. To Rest on Pesach

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 25

As the Torah says, on the first day you shall have a holy convocation (Vayikra 23:7, Parshas Emor)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which kind of work is permitted on Yom Tov, and which is forbidden?
- Can one cook on Yom Tov for those who do not observe the Yom Tov?
- Are there kinds of work that are permitted to do on a Yom Tov even if they are not related to food?
- For how many days must we not do work on Yom Tov?
- Why do we keep two days out of Israel?
- How many days of Rosh Hashanah do they observe in Israel, one or two?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is permissible to perform productive labor on Yom Tov for the preparation of food (ochel nefesh) needed by Jews, as Scripture states: "Only that which every person must eat, that alone may be prepared for you" (Shemos 12:16).

It is strictly forbidden, however, to perform labor on Yom Tov to cook or prepare food for a non-Jew.

Whoever performs prohibited melachah that is not needed for human food preparation violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh) and transgresses a biblical negative commandment (mitzvas lo sa'aseh), as Scripture states: "You shall do no manner of servile work" (Vayikra 23:7).

Kindling fire from an existing flame (hav'arah) and carrying objects through the public domain (hotza'ah) are permissible on Yom Tov even when not strictly required for food preparation, provided there is some legitimate bodily benefit or festival need (mitoch shehutarah l'tzorech, hutarah nami shelo l'tzorech).

By rabbinic enactment, every biblical festival day is observed for two days in the Diaspora due to the historic doubt concerning the calendar (safek deyoma), whereas in Eretz Yisroel only one day is observed. Rosh Hashanah, however, is observed for two days even in Eretz Yisroel.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz and eating of matzah help us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 298)

The reason why we are not to do work on a Yom Tov is so that we can be free to teach our family about the meaning of the day.

In addition we don't work so that we can go to a shul and hear a deeper insight about Pesach from a Rav or a teacher.

SFAS EMES

• The Haggadah teaches: in every generation a person must see himself as though he personally left Egypt. There is, he explains, a genuine Yetzias Mitzrayim appropriate to every generation, and within that larger generational redemption there is a personal Yetzias Mitzrayim available to every Jew. He writes that every generation possesses a form of Yetzias Mitzrayim corresponding to its own spiritual circumstances. Egypt therefore becomes more than one country in one period of history. The Hebrew name Mitzrayim (Egypt) evokes meitzar, a narrow place or constriction. This also explains why remembering the Exodus can never become obsolete. Even if every historical fact were known perfectly, the mitzvah would remain necessary because the geulah itself is still unfolding (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5631).

• The previous idea concerns what the miracles testify. The Sfas Emes adds another dimension: Yetzias Mitzrayim created a people capable of carrying that testimony into history. He states directly: Bnei Yisrael were created to testify to the Creator. A witness must be able to speak. Under Pharaoh, Israel's spiritual voice was imprisoned. The people knew suffering, but their capacity to articulate their unique mission had not yet emerged. Through geulah, Hashem not only demonstrated His mastery; He formed a nation that would remember and proclaim what had been revealed. He is freed in order to bear witness—to live in such a way that the world can recognize through him that creation has a Creator, history has a direction, and nature is not the final reality (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5657).

• The previous teaching describes what the first Exodus accomplished permanently. The Sfas Emes goes further: our annual remembrance and celebration actively participate in the unfolding of the future redemption. He writes: In every generation more illuminations of Yetzias Mitzrayim spread into the world; when all those illuminations have reached completion, the future geulah will emerge from them. Elsewhere he states the idea even more directly: "remembering and recounting the Exodus from Egypt brings the days of Mashiach." Remembering and telling Yetzias Mitzrayim bring the days of Mashiach. Pesach returns each year because the geulah still contains unrealized potential. Every generation receives its portion of the task (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5635).

• The spiritual force of Pesach is deliberately concentrated. For one week chametz disappears, Yetzias Mitzrayim dominates consciousness, and the Jew lives inside an unusually intense structure of mitzvah and memory. The Sfas Emes repeatedly explains that this concentration is meant to provide strength for the months that follow. Regarding a night of guarded watching (leil shimurim), he writes: From the night of Pesach, a protective influence remains for the entire year. Elsewhere he says: Pesach illuminates the whole year through the two qualities of remembrance and guarding. Pesach functions like a spiritual reservoir. The extraordinary week is not detached from ordinary time; it supplies ordinary time with the memory and protection needed to remain free (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5653).

• Why is the Pesach night called a Seder? The obvious answer is that the night follows an ordered sequence. The Sfas Emes gives the term a much more profound meaning. Looking backward after the redemption, Israel can discover that even the galus belonged to a Divine order (seder). He writes: The entire progression of the exile was part of a particular order. The descent to Egypt had already been foretold to Avraham at the Bris Bein HaBesarim. The Seder is the perspective available after one has come out. Pesach thus trains the Jew to believe in divine order (seder) even when he cannot yet see it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5654).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One Erev Pesach, a bechor came to the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) and mentioned that he had not found a siyum to participate in to free him from the obligation to fast on that day. The Steipler remembered that his visitor had once contributed to the expenses of publishing the sefer Kehillos Yaakov, and he thanked him for that old favor. He then asked him to come back in half an hour or so. The visitor left, thinking that the Steipler surely planned to look into the halachah and try to find an interpretation which would free him of the requirement to fast. When he returned, he was dumbfounded to hear the Steipler say, "I've just finished learning a mesechta. Now I can make a siyum for you."

The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 136

❖ The daughter of a Shaarei Chesed family, who is now long married to a rosh kollel, was going through a rough time at one point during her teen years, and was spiraling downward in school. Before Pesach, she got a haircut that came out wrong and that made her so depressed that she locked herself in her room and simply refused to come out. As the Seder night arrived, it looked as if she would not be joining her family at the table. "I went to Reb Shmuel Auerbach and told him what was going on," her father recalls. "On the leil haSeder before Maariv, Reb Shmuel walked to our home. He asked to speak with our daughter. After they spoke for a bit, she agreed to come out and join us at the Seder. If you know what Reb Shmuel was like on the leil baSeder -- his level of spiritual elevation, the way his face shone with kedushah as he sang the Hallel -- then the idea that he'd come to our home to speak with a teenager depressed about her haircut is just incredible."

From Reb Shmuel, Written By R' Eytan Kobre, Published by Judaica Press

❖ In the past we discussed the remarkable way that Rabbi and Mrs Machlis would observe Shabbos. They would often have as many as 150 guests on Friday night. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Henny Machlis's Shabbos meal was that she would do this even when they were not home! "We used to take off a few weeks a year," Henny explained in 2002, "and we would inform the people in advance. A couple of years ago, my married daughter had a baby boy on a Shabbos, so the bris was the following Shabbos, in a different city. Whoever called during the week, we told them not to come, but there was no way to announce it to our 'regulars.' Just in case, we arranged for a rabbi to be here to conduct the meal and I cooked a little, and we left challah, salads, drinks, and provisions. I thought, 'Maybe 20 people will come.' Well, 80 people showed up that Shabbos night, and 65 people the next day for lunch. "So now, if we want to go away for Shabbos, we inform people that Rabbi Machlis won't be here to give divrei Torah, but that there will be someone else to run the meal. And I cook the

food anyway 51 weeks a year. "Only on Pesach we don't have guests, and we go away, because of the special mitzvah to teach your children on the Seder night. Then we concentrate exclusively on the children and attempt to celebrate the holiday in a private family setting."

From Emunah With Love and Chicken Soup, By Sara Yocheved Rigler, Published by Shaar Press

❖ Communal leaders throughout the generations took special care to meet the needs of the impoverished — even more than their own needs. Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever was very involved in helping Jews who had been drafted into the anti-Semitic Russian army. He arranged for a kosher kitchen to supply their needs and would invite many of them to his home for Sabbaths and Festivals. Once, before Pesach, the community head came to him and said, "Rebbe, we're suffering from a bad drought this year. Prices have been going up by the day and people simply cannot afford to pay the costs involved in buying the Pesach needs of the soldiers." R' Shmuel said, "Let us assemble the rabbinical court and permit the use of kitniyos (legumes forbidden on Pesach according to Ashkenazic custom) this year." "Rebbe, " said the man, "you have taken a load off my shoulders. I was trying to see how we could feed the soldiers during Pesach, but now that you have permitted the use of kitniyos I can rest easier." "Jewish soldiers?" said R' Shmuel in indignation. "That I will not allow. You, I and all the members of the community will eat kitniyos this Pesach. But as far as the soldiers are concerned, we must feed them only the best, just as in any other year."

The Haggadah Treasury

❖ One Erev Pesach, a woman sent her grandson to Rabbi Nisson Telushkin with a question. She had forgotten to purchase cinnamon and wanted to know if she was permitted to make charoses without cinnamon. Rabbi Telushkin pulled a large volume of Shulchan Aruch from his bookshelf and spent several minutes studying it. Finally, he closed it and told the youngster: "Tell your grandmother that this year she may use the charoses even without cinnamon. However, she must be careful next year and purchase kosher-for-Pesach cinnamon immediately after Purim." The Rav then went into a side room and emerged with a bottle of wine. "Give this to your grandmother and tell her the Rav wishes her a gut yom Tov." Obviously, the question was not discussed in the Shulchan Aruch, nor did it require any research on the rabbi's parts but by giving the impression that he took their question seriously, he made sure that she and her grandson would not be ashamed to seek guidance on future occasions.

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Sometimes, Reb Dovid Feinstein's berachos carried humorous undertones, but the words were as precise as ever. Reb Dovid was visiting the office of a talmid. At the close of the visit, the talmid mentioned that he had an unmarried daughter, and he wanted a berachah for her to get married. Reb Dovid scanned the room, and his eyes rested on a bottle of whiskey. "You shouldn't have to sell that bottle for Pesach," he said. Sure enough, the engagement took place the day before Pesach, the whiskey bottle used to celebrate the simchah.

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

8. Not to Desecrate Pesach

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 147

As the Torah says, And on the fifteenth day… you shall do no laborious work (Vayikra 23:6-7, Parshas Emor)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz and eating of matzah help us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

A. TO OBSERVE CHOL HAMOED

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 17-12

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What work is permitted to be done on chol hamoed?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught in the second chapter of Maseches Chagigah (18a) that performing prohibited labor on Chol HaMoed (the intermediate festival days) is biblically forbidden, except in the case of preventing substantial financial loss (davar ha'aved). Concerning this, Chazal severely warned that anyone who treats the sacred intermediate days with contempt (hamezazeh es hamo'ados) forfeits his portion in the World to Come (Olam HaBa), because he disparages and treats Hashem's holy festivals with casual disdain.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was a Friday afternoon, about a half hour before Shabbos/Succos. Leib Klein, a very close, devoted talmid of the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon, was on his way to bring something to his good friend who would be celebrating the shalom zachor for his baby. The clock was ticking closer and closer to Shabbos. R' Leib was speeding down the road when suddenly, the telltale wail of a siren hit his ears. Looking into his mirror, his heart and stomach bed. The red lights of a police car were twirling right behind him. He had been caught speeding. Resigned, he pulled over to the side with the police on his tail. "License, registration..." the officer barked in a businesslike tone. R' Leib quietly handed them to the officer. After a brief glance, the officer thoughtfully handed the documents "back and commented, "You know what? I am going to let you off today." Completely shocked, R' Leib couldn't control his curiosity. Rather than just saying thank you and heading right back to his destination, he asked, "Why?" In all truth, R' Leib knew he had been speeding. "Do you know Rabbi Salomon?" the officer asked in reply. "Yes, I do," R' Leib answered, “in fact, I am very close with him and was his student in England, before he came to Lakewood.” "Well," the officer continued, "earlier today, the Rabbi's wife, who is in long-term rehabilitation, went home for the holiday. I was asked to give her a police escort home. I saw Rabbi Salomon looking out of the front window when we arrived at the house. When he saw me, he came outside and began to thank me. He caressed my hand, all the while blessing me. He ended off by saying, 'Thank you so much for bringing my wife home." "I still feel the warmth," the officer concluded, "so, in honor of the Rabbi, I will let you off." That Chol HaMoed, when R' Leib went to visit the Mashgiach, he told the Mashgiach, "I am going to tell the Mashgiach about a mofeis, a miracle that he

made for me without even knowing about it!" Chuckling, the Mashgiach answered with his self-deprecating humor, "Leibele, there are many mofsim that I don't know about....." R' Leib then told him the entire story. When he finished, the Mashgiach smiled and asked R' Leib, "Leibele, please go into the kitchen and tell the story to the Rebbetzin. She will enjoy it!"

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Moshe was very, very sick. The doctors decided that the only possible cure for his condition would be a transplant. Reb Moshe came to the Gerrer Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur), at the end of Elul for a berachah for the New Year and for a refuah sheleimah. He concluded by telling the Rebbe that he was scheduled to undergo a transplant just after Simchas Torah. Smiling, the Rebbe replied, "We are at the start of a new year. Everything is new. Why do you have to prepare for the future? Certainly, you will be healthy this year and will not need the transplant." Reb Moshe left the Rebbe's room in a state of euphoria! The terrible worry, the terrifying prospect of undergoing the extremely risky transplant procedure had been weighing him down, and now the Rebbe had said that he wouldn't need it! Before leaving, he asked the Rebbe, "So, should I cancel the procedure?" The Rebbe's swift reply? "Certainly!" A joyous Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos followed. Reb Moshe was able to daven with remarkable simchah, no longer weighed down by the specter of a dangerous transplant hovering over his head. On Erev Simchas Torah, the Rebbe told him, "Now that you are well, you can truly rejoice with the Torah with all your heart and soul." Those words further encouraged him, filling him with indescribable joy. It was as if he were a totally different person. On Motzaei Simchas Torah, when Reb Moshe filed past the Rebbe to take leave after such a wonderful Yom Tov, the Rebbe stopped him and said, "Reb Moshe, you should know, you will have to undergo the transplant, but there is no reason to worry. You will recover quickly and be healthy again without any further worries." The Rebbe explained, "When I saw the tremendous mental strain and worry that you were suffering because you were so scared, I felt compelled to lift you up and encourage you. I knew that it was crucial that you enjoy the Yamim Tovim in a calm frame of mind, with simchah, and an upbeat mood." Completely stunned, Reb Moshe quickly recovered his equilibrium and asked, "But Rebbe, I canceled the appointment!" "Call back and see if the slot is still open," the Rebbe advised. Indeed, when he called back, he found out that the slot was still open and reserved for him. He underwent the transplant and had a full recovery. After his recovery, he visited the Rebbe, who greeted him with tremendous simchah, exclaiming, "Yes, from Heaven you were destined to undergo the transplant, but the gezeirah was only the transplant, not the agmas nefesh, the mental anguish. I wanted you to have a Yom Tov full of simchah; thus, as soon as you canceled the appointment, I called your doctor back and asked him to hold the slot..."

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Twice a year, on Pesach and Sukkos, the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) would enjoy a vacation from the continuous pressure of the public: since he didn't hear well, and since it is forbidden to write on chol hamoed even in case of need, he was given a break from the crowds. He used this respite to learn without distraction. Some clever people had the foresight to write their requests before Yom Tov, knowing that over chol hamoed they could avoid the long line of people that normally formed during the year. However, they had to make sure to mention at the top of their note that it was not written on chol hamoed. One chol hamoed, a young man who had come to see him was taken aback when he was told that the Stiepler would not let him write a note with his requests, even though he planned to write differently from the normal fashion in a way he thought would be permissible. The young man thought quickly, and then ran to a nearby shul to get the sign which read "V'sein berachah." When he saw this, the Stiepler was very amused and gave him an unusually warm berachah.

The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 217

❖ When The Brisker Rav was approaching bar mitzvah age, his father told him that the subject of his derashah should be the wearing of tefillin on Chol Hamoed. Thus, without receiving any additional coaching or even sources to look up, the boy was expected to compose a derashah which summed up the subject; so confident was his father of his ability In live up to heavy expectations even at a young age. Velvel accepted the challenge and prepared a derashah that he delivered in his father's sukkah, amazing the listeners with clear exposition of the various sides of the issue, and providing a dear and comprehensive explanation. We see just how powerful were his words that day: his brother Moshe, eight years his senior, had until that time followed the custom of wearing tefillin on Chol haMo'ed. But when he heard Velvel's explanation of the subject and his conclusions, he decided to follow his little brother's ruling!"

The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 96

❖ One day during Pesach, a man entered the Brisker Rav's home and noticed a heavy wooden box sitting in the corner of the room, securely locked. His curiosity got the better of him, and he wished to know what valuable item had the Brisker Rav seen fit to lock up so well. "What is in the box?" he asked. Upon hearing that the box contained the rav's matzos, he was somewhat surprised, and asked jokingly, "Do the thieves have nothing to steal but the rav's matzos?" The Brisker Rav's son responded: "My father says that since the Torah says, 'And you shall guard the matzos,' one must guard them as securely as possible, just as one would a great sum of money — in a well-locked safe.

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 399

❖ If the lesson of the matzah is that man should pare his needs to a minimum and learn to forego the pleasures of the world, why does God not ask us to subsist on this simple fare all year round? Why is a week of self-control and simplicity sufficient? The Alter of Novardok explained with a parable. A policeman was escorting a prisoner on the way to his trial. Afraid that the defendant might escape, the guard attached the prisoner to himself by means of handcuffs, locking one cuff on his own right arm and the other cuff on the prisoner's left arm. As they walked through the street passersby looked scornfully at the prisoner. The prisoner could not bear the silent stares of condemnation and shouted: "Don't look at me that way! It is not the policeman who leads me, but I who lead him. Don't think I am chained to him; he is chained to me!" A wise man was not fooled. He replied to the indignant prisoner, "Let us see you escape from your 'captor' and we will know who is the captive." Likewise, explained the Alter, there is nothing wrong with enjoying some of the good things of life. But one has to be in control of them, rather than them controlling him. It all depends on whether one merely partakes of the world's pleasures or whether he becomes their prisoner. The litmus test to determine if man is the prisoner of his passions or whether he really controls them is whether he can unlock the chains of desire at will and still be content. If he must have his wants and cannot escape their shackles, then he is-truly their prisoner. God allows us to indulge ourselves to some extent, symbolized by the leavened bread we eat all year long. On Pesach, we are given the opportunity to escape and show that we are not hopelessly chained to our every whim. We eat the poor, unleavened bread as a sign of escape, thus showing that we are in control of our lives. Then we may resume eating regular bread and enjoy life without the fear of becoming enmeshed in the mundane. We really control it as opposed to the other way around. Thus, through eating matzah, the poor bread, we break the shackles of servitude on the Festival of Freedom. '.

The Haggadah Treasury

❖ Once, during Chol HaMo'ed Sukkos, Rav Iser Zalman asked his close talmid Reb David to give him a pen and an inkpot. Reb David was very surprised — had the Rosh Yeshivah forgotten that it was Chol HaMo'ed, when writing for most purposes is forbidden? — and said aloud, "Chol HaMoed." "I haven't forgotten," Rav Isser Zalman responded, "but there's something I need to write." Reb David persisted, "Does it involve incurring some loss?" "What I have to write is a matter of life and death," Reb Isser Zalman replied. Realizing that something very serious was prompting his request, Reb David extended the writing materials with any further questions. Rav Isser Zalman took the pen, took out I a sheet of paper, wrote a few words and put the paper in his pocket. Noticing Reb David's amazement he explained. "Many guests visit my

home during Chol HaMo'ed. I can't help noticing the deficiencies of some of them but it's not correct that a person who has taken the trouble of calling on me to greet me on the festival, should be subjected to my criticism. Each erev Chol HaMo'ed I therefore prepare myself a note on which I write, "Your eyes should gaze on what is true and upright, and look to what is right, to make straight" (Mishlei 4:25): "When I read this pasuk, I recall my own shortcomings and I stop noticing other people's. This time I forgot to prepare the note before Yom Tov, so I had to prepare it now. I consider It literally a matter of life and death."

In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

9. To Rest on the Last Day of Pesach

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 27

As the Torah says, on the seventh day there is a holy convocation (Vayikra 23:8, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Are the last days of Pesach as just stringent as the first?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic status and laws governing the seventh day of Pesach are identical to those of the first day of Pesach regarding resting from servile labor and permitting food preparation (ochel nefesh).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. We can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

MAHARAL — GUR ARYEH

The last days of Pesach commemorates the splitting of the sea. Our Sages teach us that during the splitting of the sea all of waters of the world split. That demonstrated Hashem's mastery over the entire world, not just one localized area, like during the ten plagues. That is why this event is celebrated as a distinct celebration.

SFAS EMES

• Leaving Egypt removed the external master, but a person can remain enslaved internally. The body has its desires, fears, habits, and demands. If these rule the person, Pharaoh may be gone while a different form of slavery remains. The Sfas Emes therefore says an astonishing thing: The sea split outside them, and something split inside them as well. When Klal Yisrael entered the water with mesirus nefesh, they demonstrated that the

higher self could rule the physical self. Such a person can possess physical needs without being possessed by them. Krias Yam Suf completed the inner Exodus by establishing this power of nullification of physicality (bittul ha-chomer) within Klal Yisrael (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5632).

• The first redemption from Egypt was rooted in Hashem's promise to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The Sfas Emes explains that Hashem then desired a second geulah—a redemption in which Klal Yisrael themselves would participate through their emunah. This explains the strange command to turn back toward Egypt. They had tasted freedom and were then commanded to place themselves in danger again. Following Hashem under those conditions required real emunah. The Sfas Emes therefore writes: The miracle was that Israel themselves became worthy partners in the redemption. This is also reflected later in "This is my God" (zeh Eli) before "The God of my father" (Elokei avi). The Hashem of their fathers had now become a personally attained reality. The inheritance of the Avos had entered their own souls (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5632).

• The Torah itself explains the purpose of the Exodus: Freedom creates the ability to serve Hashem. The Sfas Emes places Shevi'i Shel Pesach directly in the middle of this transformation. Until Krias Yam Suf, the primary movement was "going out from beneath the subjugation of Egypt." Then comes the seventh day of Pesach as a sacred assembly (Atzeres): Pesach releases Israel from the wrong master and begins preparing them to accept the true Master. This gives the word spiritual freedom (cheirus) a positive destination. The same movement is reflected in "This is my God and I will glorify Him" (zeh Eli ve-anveihu). The Sfas Emes explains "and I shall glorify Him" (ve-anveihu) as preparing a peaceful abode (naveh) for Hashem, through the 248 mitzvos corresponding to the 248 limbs. Revelation at the sea must enter the way a Jew actually lives (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5651).

• The Sfas Emes distinguishes between sacred speech (dibbur) and inner voice (kol). Speech is shaped and controlled by the person. The inner voice (kol) comes from a deeper internal place. Yetzi'as Mitzrayim began the redemption of Jewish speech. The Sfas Emes answers, based on the Zohar, that they became attached to the common root of their souls, and the hidden inner voice (kol) within Israel awakened. This also prepares the way for we will do and we will hear (na'aseh v'nishma). A person first labors in doing. Eventually he can become quiet enough to hear. At the sea, their silence allowed a deeper voice to emerge (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5633).

• The deepest reach of the final day of Pesach is into the future. The Sfas Emes explains that Israel understood that Krias Yam Suf created the root from which later redemptions would emerge. Therefore the Shirah contains "everything that would unfold throughout all subsequent exiles." He then connects this with the great prophetic promise that the "day" of Krias Yam Suf contained a root of the future "day" when Hashem's unity will be revealed completely. The Shirah had been waiting, as it were, from Creation for a people capable of bringing it into the world, and it also points forward to the final completion of that song. Every later generation that sings Az Yashir attaches itself both to the first great geulah and to the geulah still to come (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5637).

10. Not to Desecrate the Last Day of Pesach

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 148

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Scripture commands regarding the conclusion of Pesach: "On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall do no servile work" (Vayikra 23:8).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

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Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. We can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

11. To Eat Matzah

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 23

As the Torah says, in the evening you shall eat unleavened bread (Shemos 12:18, Parshas Bo).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can one make matzah out of oats?
- Can one make matzah out of buckwheat?
- Which species can one make matzah out of?
- Matzah is a time-bound mitzvah. Are women obligated to eat matzah?
- Are children obligated to eat matzah?
- Are you allowed to eat matzah before Pesach? How about on Erev Pesach?
- Are you obligated to have charoses at the seder?
- Which berachah do we make on marror?
- Which berachah do we make on charoses?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The matzah must be prepared exclusively from one of the five primary grain species: wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats.

Women are equally obligated by biblical law to eat matzah on the Seder night, just as men are, for whoever is bound by the prohibition against eating chametz is included in the commandment to eat matzah.

A young child who has reached the age of training (chinuch) must be educated to eat at least an olive's volume (kezayis) of matzah.

By rabbinic decree, it is forbidden to eat matzah on the fourteenth of Nissan (Erev Pesach), so that the matzah will be eaten at night with eager appetite and anticipation (lete'avon).

It is likewise an enactment of the Sages to partake of the following symbolic foods on the Seder night:

1. Maror (bitter herbs), recalling the bitter enslavement of our ancestors in Egypt.

2. Charoses (a thick fruit and wine paste simulating the mortar of Egyptian bondage) into which the maror is dipped.

Before eating the maror, one must recite the prescribed blessing: "Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of maror" (al achilas maror).

Over the charoses itself, no blessing is recited, as it serves as an accompaniment and seasoning for the maror.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The eating of Matzah helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:43)

The matzah reminds us about our slavery in Egypt. During good and prosperous times, we are to remember our bitter past and bitter slavery in Egypt. This helps us both to appreciate what we have as well as allows us to develop humility.

MAHARAL

The matzah symbolizes freedom, because it is simple and totally unencumbered. This symbolizes both the physical freedom, as well as the spiritual freedom from the impurity of Egypt that we achieved then. We access that same freedom from our yetzer hara when we eat it on Pesach.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 11)

The matzah reminds us of the speed with which Hashem took us out of Mitzraim, and how the Egyptians kicked us out so fast that the dough was not able to rise.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The matzah reminds us of the speed with which Hashem took us out of Mitzraim, and how the Egyptians kicked us out so fast that the dough was not able to rise. When we remember that the Jews tried to make bread and let it rise, but were unable, we remember the speed with which the Egyptians kicked us out of Mitzraim, and we remember that we did not leave on our own. It was not a slave revolt. We only left because of the great miracles Hashem performed and caused the Egyptians to kick us out. This is a reminder that we only left because of Hashem, and keeps us appreciative towards Hashem for that great miracle. If one denies that we were taken out by Hashem with miracles he denies one of the foundations of the Torah.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

The concept of chametz and matzah is the following. Up until the Geula from Mitzraim the Bnei Yisrael were mixed among the goyim and were on their low level, but when they left Mitzraim they were nigael and separated from the goyim.

Until they left, all humanity even Yisrael were in the darkness of tumah that ruled over them, but when Yisrael left mitzrayim they were free from the ruling of the tumah and they were purified and prepared to learn Torah and serve Hashem.

In order to once again access that liberating purification, we destroy chametz and eat matzah. Bread is really best for the necessary state of man which is to have some inclination towards materialism. Chametz is something that makes it easy to digest and makes it taste good. But for one week we are to reject chametz to limit our yetzer hara and netia to chomer and strengthen our netia to ruchniyus. We can't stop from eating chometz entirely because that isn't the way Hashem wanted the world, but for one week we don't eat chametz. That is a receptacle to absorb the inherent hashpa of the day. All of the other mitzvos of Pesach have the same effect, to allow us to be mekabel the hashpa.

SFAS EMES

• The Zohar gives matzah a second famous title: the bread of healing (michla de-asvasa). The Sfas Emes explains that Yetzias Mitzrayim contained two simultaneous movements: a blow to Egypt and a healing for Israel. This image is important because slavery leaves damage even after the slave leaves the place of slavery. Egypt had entered Israel psychologically and spiritually. The nation required more than escape. Matzah represents that healing. The very spiritual poverty (oni) and struggle through which Israel passed could now be incorporated into the cure. Geulah must be followed by refuah. Matzah is food for the journey from one to the other (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5654).

• Pesach and Shavuos are not separate stories. The Exodus begins a process that culminates at Sinai. The Sfas Emes therefore understands matzah as preparation for Torah. He develops an unusual wordplay around spiritual poverty (oni) and inner voice (kol), linking the poor bread with the emergence of voice. At Pesach, the first stage is the voice of prayer and dependence (kol tefillah). Later comes the voice of Torah (kol Torah). The progression corresponds to the larger journey from faith to understanding. They had to leave, count, prepare, and then stand at Sinai. Matzah is thus the food eaten by a student before the full lesson begins (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5652).

• The Zohar famously calls matzah the food of faith (michla de-meheimnusa). The Sfas Emes explains this not as a vague association between matzah and belief, but as a precise description of the spiritual condition of Israel at the time of the Exodus. The nation followed Hashem before it fully understood what was happening. He writes that matzah represents the ability to be drawn after Hashem even without a fully understood reason, through the path of faith. Matzah therefore teaches a form of faith that precedes knowledge but is meant eventually to produce knowledge. Pesach begins with faith (emunah); the journey through Sefiras HaOmer leads toward spiritual awareness (da'as) and Torah at Shavuos (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5639).

• The Torah states that matzah is eaten "so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life." The usual reading is that matzah reminds us of the Exodus. The Sfas Emes reads the relationship more dynamically: through the eating of matzah on Pesach, the Jew acquires the spiritual capacity to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim throughout the year. He writes: Through this bread of affliction (lechem oni), you will remember the Exodus all the days of your life. The difference is significant. Matzah is not just a visual aid. Matzah therefore becomes a yearly investment in memory. The physical act of eating on one night must become an orientation that survives long after the crumbs are gone (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5652).

• One of the Sfas Emes's most concrete teachings is that mitzvos repair the bodily faculties through which they are performed. Matzah is unusual because the mitzvah is accomplished by eating, and therefore, he says, the eating of the Korban Pesach and matzah repairs the faculty of eating. This idea deserves careful attention. Eating is one of the most basic points of contact between the human being and the physical world. The body needs food, but eating is also a major arena of desire. Instead, the very faculty that can bind a person to appetite becomes the instrument of redemption. The mouth that consumed in slavery now eats by Divine command (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5663).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the importance of appreciating what you have, and how that can be the definition of wealth.
- Discuss the importance of humility.
- Discuss how the freedom that we achieved from Egypt was also a moral freedom from our Yetzer hara.
- Discuss how Yetzias Mitzrayim is the empirical basis of our emunah in Hashem, (It teaches how Hashem created and runs the world, gives prophecy, and gives schar veonesh. These three are the encapsulation of the Rambam's 13 ikarim) and if one denies that, he denies the basis of the Torah.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A patient suffering from a chronic, intensely painful but non-life-threatening medical condition had surgery scheduled for the morning of Erev Pesach. Undergoing the surgery would leave him bedridden and suffering post-operative surgical pain on Seder night, severely impeding his ability to eat matzah and celebrate the Seder with joy. Rescheduling the surgery to private care would cost twenty percent of his net wealth. Is he obligated to postpone the surgery and pay the exorbitant fee to fulfill Seder night with joy?

Answer: He doesn't have to endure the pain or pay that much money if it's 20 of his assets.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 405

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One year at matzah baking time, a certain person, upon seeing The Brisker Rav's legendary efforts in baking his matzos, shared with The Brisker Rav the following story that is told of R. Leib of Sassov, a Chassidic Rebbe also known for his great care and extra hiddurim in baking his matzos. The Rebbe was once baking his matzos at a certain bakery when a simple Jew arrived to bake his own matzos. When he saw how careful the Rebbe was in baking his matzos he became discouraged; he did not have the wherewithal to make such efforts with his own matzos. The man turned to the wall in the corner of the bakery and raised his voice in passionate prayer: "Master of the Universe! I am a simple and poor man; it is not possible for me to be as careful as the Rebbe is in baking matzos. But, You, You can do anything. May it be Your will that my matzos come out of the oven as kosher and mehudarim as those of the Rebbe..." When the Rebbe heard this Jew's pure and moving prayer, he approached him and asked him to exchange matzos. "Please take my matzos that I worked so hard over and give me the ones you baked." The Brisker Rav understood that the man's intention in telling him the story was to say that matzos that are accompanied by sincere prayers are preferable to those that have been produced with the greatest hiddurim and with attention to the fine points of halachah. That being so, The Brisker Rav answered him: 'On the contrary, the story teaches that prayer is effective. That Jew's prayers were accepted, and therefore he merited matzos that were more mehudar than the ones over which the Rebbe had worked so hard, so that they should have the ultimate level of kashrus!"

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 400

❖ Erev Pesach, 5707/1947. The Klausenberger Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam) had returned to America to settle there. He had been living in America since the middle of Chanukah. With great effort, the Rebbe had arranged for himself, his talmidim, and some baalei battim who had become his admirers to go to a matzah bakery on the Lower East Side to bake Erev Pesach matzos. The baalei battim were awestruck by the Rebbe's exalted avodah as he sang Hallel. They could sense his deep longing for the ultimate singing of Hallel in the Beis HaMikdash. After completing their task, they returned to the yeshivah that the Rebbe had established soon after his arrival. They walked in, and the Rebbe stopped, a troubled look clouding his face. He didn't smell food cooking for Yom Tov. Peering into the kitchen, he realized to his consternation that yes, the kitchen had been cleaned; yes, the kitchen had been koshered; yes, the raw ingredients for Yom Tov were there —but no food had been cooked for the bachurim! It was just a few hours before the onset of Yom Tov, and there was nothing to serve his bachurim! Without hesitating for a second, the Rebbe strode into the kitchen, grabbed a knife, and began peeling potatoes. The baalei battim were astounded. Was it possible that the holy Rebbe would be reduced to being a cook? "Why are you so surprised?" the Rebbe asked. "Do you think that baking matzah on Erev Pesach is more important than feeding a bachur who is a ben Torah?" With a wry smile, the Rebbe then added, "If you feel it is not fitting for me to be a cook, I have nothing against you joining me and helping me prepare Yom Tov food for the bachurim!"

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Berel was a Gerrer chassid who owned a matzah bakery. Once, the Pnei Menachem approached him for a favor. "Reb Klonymus is one of your workers. Perhaps you can give him a raise. He could really use the extra money." As a chassid, Reb Berel did not ask questions and immediately gave the raise. On Erev Pesach, when a group of Gerrer chassidim were baking the matzos that would be used at the Rebbe's tish, the Rebbe veered from his pre-Shacharis walking route and instead walked to the Beis Yisrael neighborhood, where the matzah bakery was located. Walking over to the owner, the Rebbe handed him an envelope, saying, "Enclosed is the amount of the extra money you paid for Reb Klonymus' raise." Reb Berel could not believe it! Clearly, the Rebbe did not want a chessed to be done on his request for another, even if the person performing the chessed deemed it the greatest zechus to fulfill the Rebbe's desire.

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One year, the late Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal, traveled to America to spend the Pesach festival with his children. It was R' Segal's custom to eat only matzos which were baked under his personal supervision. Along with his suitcases, R' Segal brought to the airport a few boxes of matzos. As he stood on line to check his luggage, another traveler approached him. "Rabbi, I see that you have quite a bit of baggage. I'm a seasoned traveler and I can tell you that your things are going to be very much overweight — it's going to cost you a lot. "Take my advice: Put those boxes on the side somewhere; no one will take them. When you get to the counter, just show them your suitcases. Later, when you board the plane, take the boxes with you — I assure you that no one will bother you." R' Segal looked at the man as if he had not heard him correctly. "I don't understand — are you suggesting that I try to trick the airline personnel? How can a person do such a thing? It's dishonest!" The boxes cost fifty British pounds in baggage fees. As he withdrew the money from his wallet, R' Segal remarked joyfully, "Another hiddur (beautification) in the [mitzvah of] matzah!" There is more than one way to beautify a mitzvah.

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ On the afternoon before Pesach, when his chassidim were baking matzos for the Seder, the Rabbi of Vizhnitz noted that one of his supervisors had shouted at one of the participants for not being more agile in rolling out the matzah dough. "One must never shout, " the Rabbi said. The supervisor defended himself, "But Rabbi, even the minutest trace of chametz is forbidden." "Of course, " said the Rabbi. "But the minutest trace of rage is an even greater transgression than the minutest trace of chametz."

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

A. TO DRINK FOUR CUPS OF WINE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment for both men and women to drink four cups of wine (arba kosos) on the Seder night of Pesach, corresponding to the four expressions of redemption with which Hashem delivered Klal Yisroel from Egypt.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes begins with the familiar teaching that the four cups correspond to the four expressions of redemption. He asks what the structure of four means beyond the number of verbal promises. The Zohar teaches that speech itself was in exile in Egypt. A Jew's ability to utter proper words before Hashem was constricted. The mouth has five distinct points of articulation; the Sfas Emes connects matzah with the teeth and the four cups with the remaining groups of articulation. By pairing the chewing of matzah through the teeth with the drinking of the four cups across the other four vocal pathways, the Seder restores the full spectrum of redeemed Jewish speech (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5633).

• The Sfas Emes returns to the four expressions of redemption and the faculties of the mouth but develops a new argument. The Sfas Emes explains the institution of kiddush over wine because Shabbos, too, is testimony connected with the Exodus from Egypt (Yetzias Mitzrayim) and the covenant of speech. He is tracing a single

structure from the four cups to the ability to testify to Hashem with one's mouth. This explains why the discourse moves naturally from the four cups of Pesach to the wine of Shabbos Kiddush: both are sacred moments in which a redeemed tongue bears witness to the Creator (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5654).

• A second maamar begins with a textual difficulty. Why would the Divine message be given at that moment if its listeners could not absorb it? The Sfas Emes explains that the words were intended not only for the people standing in Egypt but for every later generation. They became part of Torah so that the meaning of redemption could continue unfolding long after the actual event. The original departure happened in haste (be-chipazon). The Sfas Emes writes that what happened hurriedly at the Exodus later becomes "arranged and understood afterward in detail." Together, the four cups and the spoken narrative of the Haggadah allow each generation to absorb the unfolding light of the Exodus (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5644).

• The Sfas Emes observes that the Exodus is described through four expressions of Divine attention: seeing, hearing, remembering, and knowing. He pairs these with the four principal senses of the head—sight, hearing, taste, and smell—and cites earlier books that connect the four sections of the head-tefillin with these faculties. The four cups, which correspond to the four expressions of redemption, can therefore also be viewed as a response to the four ways a human being engages the world. Drawing on earlier sefarim that link the four compartments of the head-tefillin to the four senses, the Sfas Emes shows how drinking the four cups sanctifies all four perceptual faculties in gratitude for the Exodus (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5647).

• The Sfas Emes proposes an explicit correspondence between the four cups and the four Torah passages of tefillin. He begins with a surprising observation about their order. In the Torah, "Sanctify to Me every firstborn" comes before "And it shall be when Hashem brings you" (ve-hayah ki yevi'acha), even though the latter speaks directly about the Exodus. Why should an expression of intrinsic holiness (kedushah) precede the account of redemption? His answer is that Klal Yisrael's designation as holy to Hashem precedes and explains the exile. Egypt was not a random calamity from which Hashem happened to rescue the people. By matching the four cups to the four Torah passages of tefillin, the Sfas Emes shows how the Seder unites our eternal election with the unfolding story of redemption (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5655).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ When the Beis HaLevi was rav in Slutzk, a man came and asked him whether he could fulfill the requirement of drinking four cups for the Seder with milk, and in response the rav gave him a large amount of tzedakah. He explained afterward that if the man was asking about milk, he obviously did not have enough money for meat, since one may not follow a meat meal with a cup of milk. This story became a classic example of the wisdom and sensitivity a rav must have in dealing with the needs of his community. Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk exhibited similar compassion to that of his father. A boy came to Reb Chaim to ask a she'eilah. His wan face gave the impression that he lacked proper nutrition. "Am I allowed to eat meat during the nine days?" he asked. "Yes, you may certainly eat meat," answered the rav, adding, "Tell your mother, too, that she may eat meat." The child left and those present asked the obvious question, "What did his mother have to do with the matter?" "Of course," answered Reb Chaim, "if the child is so pale and sickly, we may assume that his mother is even weaker than he is, therefore I ruled that she may also eat meat."

From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim

B. TO EAT MAROR

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

In the post-Temple era, eating maror (bitter herbs) on the Seder night is a rabbinic commandment, established to commemorate how the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors with crushing servitude.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes reads Hillel's practice of combining Pesach, matzah, and maror as a declaration that the bitter exile and the redemption were not disconnected acts of Divine direction. He explains that "the numerical value of maror (446) equals that of maves (death)": the bitterness of exile resembles death, yet it is a stage through which new life can emerge. The Jewish people are thus not asked to forget what oppression felt like. They are asked to place its taste inside the night devoted to Divine deliverance. The most revealing feature of this maamar is its treatment of the obligation to taste the maror. The Sfas Emes is attentive to the unusual order of the Haggadah here. The statement about personally leaving Egypt follows the maror because the individual still needs to experience the transition from present bitterness toward anticipated redemption (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5653).

• The Sfas Emes begins with the Haggadah's phrase "with a strong hand" (be-yad chazakah) and asks why Hashem sometimes leads a person toward redemption through severity. In Egypt the people were not necessarily ready to depart. They were at risk of becoming attached to Egyptian society, and the bitterness of slavery made continued dependence intolerable. The Sfas Emes cites the Zohar's explanation that the Egyptians' hostility served this protective purpose, then develops a distinct inward application: suffering can awaken a person's neglected spiritual needs. Bodily pain can become the occasion for a cry that originates in the soul. Physical trouble can awaken a formerly obscured pain of the soul. The cry that results is not only a request for easier circumstances but also a renewed consciousness of one's spiritual condition (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5655).

• The Sfas Emes gives a different explanation of maror through the Zohar's reading of Egypt. It was not only a place where Klal Yisrael suffered; it was also a society into which they might have become absorbed. The Zohar teaches that Hashem caused the Egyptians to hate the Jewish people, thereby preventing the two peoples from mingling. The Sfas Emes sees a protective consequence hidden within the cruelty of Egyptian oppression: the very hostility that made their lives bitter kept them conscious that they did not belong to Egyptian society. Through the bitter herbs of maror, Israel recognizes how even painful constriction served to preserve their distinct covenantal identity in exile (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5644).

• The Sfas Emes draws a sharp division of labor between the two foods of the night: "and this is the mitzvah of eating matzah and maror" — the matzah is for the redemption, and the maror is for the galus. The question is why the galus needs its own mitzvah-food at the Seder of redemption. Why not let the night belong entirely to freedom, and leave the bitterness to the history books? The answer: because the bitterness that our fathers experienced in Egypt was a preparation, a salvation, and an enduring structure for us in every galus. When Hashem showed Moshe "I will be" — in the other distresses to come, He showed him that the galus of Egypt is

the prototype and the preparation for all the troubles. The implication is hinted in the phrase "all the days of your life" comes to include the nights: the mitzvah of maror is the praise of the galus as such — the nights as well as the days — because the nights of Egypt taught Israel how to survive every night (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5647).

• A later maamar offers a different interpretation of "With matzos and bitter herbs they shall eat it". The Sfas Emes begins with Hashem's words to Yaakov. The promise is not only that Hashem will bring Yaakov out of Egypt. It is also that Hashem will be with him during the descent. Maror represents that Divine companionship at the very point when life feels constricted. The Sfas Emes expresses this through "I am with him in distress" (imo Anochi ve-tzarah) and the verse "A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved unto me". Even in the bitter constriction symbolized by maror, Hashem remains intimately present with His people until He leads them out into redemption (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5663).

C. TO DIP MAROR INTO CHAROSES

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-6

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to dip the maror into charoses before eating it on the Seder night, both to mitigate the sharp intensity of its venomous sap (kaha) and to recall the clay and mortar with which the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The mitzvah of dipping marror into charoses is rabbinic, and it sits inside a striking silence in the Sfas Emes's Pesach writings: beyond the classic symbolism of recalling the mortar and the apple trees of Egypt, the Sfas Emes in his discourse on Mah Nishtanah focuses on the pedagogical power of the act of dipping itself. This implies that the dip's function is exhausted the moment the child asks why we dip twice tonight, because the answer — the whole Haggadah — can then begin. Applied to our mitzvah, the implication is that dipping the sharp marror into the sweet charoses is the Seder's way of enrolling the silent child: a question made edible, drawing even the unasking mouth into the night of questions. That is why dipping the bitter herbs into sweet charoses holds such a cherished place at the Seder table: it awakens the child's curiosity and opens the heart to the story of redemption (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5646).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Gifter had an uncanny ability to say the right thing in the right way at the right time, to make people comfortable and put them at ease. He once attended a meeting just before Pesach at the home of a Telzer talmid. When he walked into the house, it was in a state of pre-Pesach disarray. Apparently, the wife of his talmid had not had a chance to clean up

before the meeting, and she was highly embarrassed. Sensing the shame of the woman, Rav Gifter said, "I want you to know, if your house looked like anything but this, I would not eat in your home over Pesach!" Immediately the woman smiled and felt better.

Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

12. To Destroy Chametz

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 22

As the Torah says, only on the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses (Shemos 12:15, Parshas Bo)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is the "first day" mentioned in this verse, referring to removing chametz on the first day of Pesach?
- When must the chametz be removed by?
- How does one get rid of chametz?
- If one didn't find all of his chametz, can he simply say that he disowns the chametz?
- When should one check for chametz?
- Why do we check chametz at night when you can't see as well?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Through the Oral Tradition (Torah sheb'al Peh), Chazal derived that the biblical command "on the first day you shall destroy leaven from your homes" (Shemos 12:15) refers to the fourteenth of Nissan, prior to the midday hour when chametz becomes biblically forbidden.

The biblical obligation of eradication (tashbisu) requires a person to physically destroy all known chametz in his possession. Any leaven of which he remains unaware must be nullified in his heart through mental renunciation (bitul chametz), deeming it completely ownerless and as valueless as the dust of the earth.

By rabbinic enactment, a person is required to thoroughly search his premises (bedikas chametz) and eliminate all leaven at the very onset of the night of the fourteenth of Nissan, inspecting every room by the light of a single candle.

The Sages instituted this nocturnal search because people are generally present in their homes at night, and the steady, focused illumination of a candle is ideally suited for examining hidden nooks and crevices.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our

yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

MAHARAL

Chometz, puffed out bread, symbolizes a lack of simplicity and being encumbered. It is the opposite of matzah which is the simplest form of bread. Chametz is therefore a symbol of encumberment and slavery. It also symbolizes being a slave to the yetzer hara. We want to destroy the symbol of being enslaved to the yetzer hara.

GEMARA BERACHOS 17A

The yetzer hara is called the se'or sheba'isah, the leaven in the dough. Chametz symbolizes the yetzer hara.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

Chometz symbolizes excess and tayva, lust, because it is tastier than simple matzah. Destroying chametz symbolizes that we want to limit our desire for excess.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 117)

The raised dough symbolizes our arrogance which we want to eliminate. Matzah represent humility.

Chametz also represents lack of speed to do the mitzvos of Hashem. Matzah represents zrizus and alacrity to perform mitzvos.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH — CHOREV

Matzo represents the fact that we were quickly thrown out of mitzrayim only by means of the miracles of the exodus. It represents the fact that we left mitzrayim only because of Hashem's miracles, not our own skill. Chametz would represent the opposite, a denial that we left quickly because of those miracles.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes frequently identifies chametz with the language of Chazal: “the fermenting yeast in the dough (the evil inclination)” (se'or she-ba-isah). Just as a small amount of leaven enters dough and alters the entire mixture, the Yetzer Hara enters the human personality and works from within it. The distortion is rarely experienced as something entirely foreign. It becomes mixed into ordinary desire, ambition, intelligence, physical appetite, and even spiritual aspiration. Because it operates within the “dough,” it can become difficult to distinguish the original good from the ferment that has entered it. The Sfas Emes traces this condition back to the sin of Adam HaRishon. Through the Eitz HaDaas, goodness (tov) and evil (ra) became mixed together throughout Creation and within the human being. The person acknowledges that not everything that has grown within him deserves to remain. There are additions that have entered his desires and habits that must be recognized as leavening agent (se'or) and removed before a new beginning can emerge (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5662).

• One of the most important teachings appears in a later Pesach maamar. The Sfas Emes explains that when Israel left Egypt, they became capable of receiving berachah at the root of the shefa itself. The Divine abundance descends from a simple source. As it moves into the created world, it becomes divided, clothed, and distributed through many natural processes. The Sfas Emes calls this process of change and expansion a form of fermentation and delay (chimutz). Destroying chametz declares that nature is not the source. The Jew is preparing to receive his life once again from Hashem at the point from which all natural channels emerge (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5647).

• In one of his earliest Pesach teachings, the Sfas Emes explains the physical difference between matzah and chametz in psychological terms: Matzah remains as it is. Chametz rises through the breath of life blown from within (nefichah), swelling itself upward. The physical inflation becomes an image of arrogance (gasus) and self-exaltation (hisnas'us). The symbolism is exact. Chametz becomes larger in appearance without receiving an entirely new essential substance. Air enters the dough and makes it rise. The Sfas Emes sees in this a picture of the human ego: clearing away chametz removes the false inflation surrounding our God-given faculties, so that the person can once again experience his abilities as gifts entrusted to him rather than possessions proving his independence (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5631).

• The Sfas Emes develops a foundational distinction between matzah and chametz: Chametz represents what is added afterward. Matzah remains with what was originally placed into the dough and possesses "nothing of itself." This symbolism is especially appropriate to Yetzias Mitzrayim. The first geulah was overwhelmingly a Divine act. Israel did not gradually construct its freedom through political organization or military strength. Hashem intervened and brought the nation out. The people were required to respond with emunah and mitzvos, but the essential power of redemption came from above. This yearly return to the original gift protects later achievement from becoming self-worship. The Jew can build only after remembering Who supplied the foundation (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5654).

• External removal is incomplete if the inner attachment remains. The Sfas Emes uses Chazal's phrase: "No leavening shall be seen with you—nullify it within your heart." When the thing is no longer important in the person's heart and he becomes repelled by it, he can truly be freed from it. This insight reaches beyond legal ownership. A desire exercises power because the person assigns value to it. Something may be absent from his hands while still occupying a honored place within his imagination. Biur chametz therefore asks the Jew to examine not only what he possesses but what he respects. Spiritual freedom begins when the heart stops admiring the very things from which it seeks to escape (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5640).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Yoni owned a small company that manufactured and sold pretzels and other similar snacks. All of his snacks were chometz. For several years, before each Pesach, Yoni would arrange for his factory and all of the chometz that it contained to be sold to Peter Wilson, a non-Jewish colleague of his. This colleague also happened to own a food business and Yoni often did business with him. The value of the factory and all of the chometz was close to half a million dollars. Before Pesach, in accordance with the accepted custom, Peter paid a relatively small deposit on the chametz that he bought. In past years, Peter would return his deposit and resell the chometz back to Yoni. This year however, Peter did something different. After Pesach was over Peter presented Yoni with a check of close to $500,000. "What is this?" asked Yoni. Peter replied, "This year I want to buy you out". "What do you mean?" Yoni asked with alarm. "Well, the truth is, your products really compete with mine and I would like to buy you out so that you no

longer compete with me," Peter said. “But what do you mean, we have been friends for years!" asked Yoni. “I keep my business interests and social interests separate”, answered Peter. “Yoni, you already sold me your factory. I paid a deposit. Now let’s finish this deal. You already gave me your word that you were selling this”. Yoni felt very torn. Yes, he sold his factory to Peter for Pesach, but as in past years he expected to buy it back after Pesach was over. This year Peter intended to perform a sort of “hostile takeover” over Yoni’s company. Does Yoni have to go through with the deal? On the one hand, perhaps he is allowed to back out of the deal because he never intended a permanent takeover. On the other hand, if he does not go through with the sale, it may indicate that his pre-Pesach sale of chametz was never sincere. What is Yoni's obligation?

Answer: He has to complete the sale.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 218

A man whom we will call Yosef had a large collection of expensive whiskeys in his cellar. Every year when Pesach arrived, he sold his chametz, and included his extensive whiskey collection in the sale. One year a fire broke out in his cellar on Pesach. Luckily, Yosef had fire insurance. Once the holiday was over, the insurance company made a large payout to Yosef, based on the contents of his cellar. A large part of the payment was intended to cover the loss of the liquor. Yosef wondered if he was allowed to accept payment for the chametz. He thought, "If I accept the money I will be benefitting from chametz. Also, this particular chametz didn’t even belong to me; it belonged to the non Jewish gentleman who purchased it from me. Additionally, if I accept this money, it will be clear that I never took the sale of the chametz seriously.” Yosef took his question to a Rav. Would it be permitted to keep the insurance money? What do you think?

Answer: “The Whiskey Collection” This story is discussed in Chashukei Chemed Pesachim p. 212. Rabbi Zilberstein writes that if the chometz was insured in a normal manner he cannot accept the money. There is a way to restructure the insurance policy ahead of time to be able to keep the payout if such an event occurs.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 212

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was late at night on leil bedikas chametz when a widow from the community of Brisk arrived. With tears coursing down her cheeks, she told Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk that her house was completely empty and she had nothing at all for the upcoming festival. Her thirteen orphaned children would starve. Reb Chaim did not hesitate for long. He went over to the cabinet where Rebbetzin Lifsha Soloveitchik had put all the Pesach provisions, the product of hours of labor. He emptied the contents, carried everything out to a horse-drawn wagon standing outside, and directed the wagon driver to the widow's address. When the Rebbetzin came into the kitchen the next morning to finish preparations, she was horrified to discover that all of the Pesach food was gone. The entire city was astir with the news; a theft had occurred in the rav's home on erev Yom Tov! A storm of activity ensued. No one could allow the rav of the city to be left with nothing on erev Pesach, and so generous donations of delicious food were collected from all around and sent to the home of the rav. In the end there was enough for the entire festival. Only after the Seder did the rav agree to share the identity of the "thief" with his wife. "But how could you leave us like that with no food for Pesach?" she asked. "Be assured," answered Reb Chaim, "I knew that the rav of the city would not be left without food. Everyone would come to supply our needs. But that poor widow - who would have taken care of her if I hadn't?"

From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim

13. Not to See Your Own Chametz

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 2

As the Torah says, no leavened bread shall be seen with you… seven days (Shemos 13:7, Parshas Bo).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man gave money to a Jewish friend traveling through an international airport duty-free shop to purchase a bottle of premium whiskey on his behalf. The traveler bought the whiskey during the intermediate days of Pesach (Chol HaMoed). Upon receiving the bottle after Yom Tov, the purchaser realized it had been acquired on Pesach by a Jewish agent and wondered whether the whiskey is permanently forbidden for use or consumption under the rabbinic injunction against chametz owned by a Jew on Pesach (chametz she-avar alav ha-Pesach). Is the whiskey permitted?

Answer: The whisky may be used.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 389

Rabbi Levine would sell the chometz for his entire congregation every year. He would sell it every year to a religious Christian named Peter McNamara. In total, all of the chometz sold each year was likely worth at least $50,000. One year during Pesach, Peter told Rabbi Levine that he learned some fascinating news. He was doing some genealogy research with Ancestry.com and he just learned, and later confirmed that his maternal grandmother, his mother's mother was also Jewish. "It doesn't really matter", Peter insisted, because I'm Christian, and I was raised Christian, but I thought it was fascinating that we had this in common". But Rabbi Levine listened with horror. If Peter's maternal grandmother was Jewish, so was his mother. Therefore even if Peter was a Christian, he still had a Jewish neshamah, and he was still Jewish. It turned out that all of the chometz that Rabbi Levine sold to Peter was really in the possession of a Jew on Pesach. Normally if chometz was in the possession of a Jew on Pesach, that would forbid the chometz to be eaten forever. But in this case should all of the chametz still be forbidden even after Pesach? On one hand you can say that it will be forbidden because the chametz was owned by a Jew on Pesach. But on the other hand, this was worth a lot of money. Would the knas, the penalty, not apply in this case because it was accidental?

Answer: Regarding the question of the Chometz sold to the Christian who turned out to be a Jew, Rav Zilberstein said that in that case we can 'bidieved' rely on the bitul that was made. Therefore the chometz was never sold because there was no intention to sell it to a Jew. Now that it wasn't sold, it was made ownerless with the bitul. Therefore the Chometz was not in a Jew's possession on Pesach.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive

On the night of the fourteenth of Nisan (Bedikas Chametz), a homeowner was incapacitated with high fever and severe influenza, with no Jewish family members or neighbors available to assist. May he designate his non-Jewish domestic housekeeper to search the house by candlelight on his behalf, and should he recite the blessing upon her search?

Answer: It seems that he can use a non-Jew to check, but he should not make the Bracha.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 112

A homeowner placed his large municipal garbage receptacle in his private driveway. On the intermediate days of Pesach, a passerby tossed a half-eaten bread sandwich into the trash bin. Does the Jewish homeowner violate the prohibition of owning chametz (bal yera'eh and bal yimatzei) since the receptacle stands within his private domain, and how must he dispose of the leaven?

Answer: It would be best to destroy it.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 76

A non-religious grocery owner executed a formal bill of sale for his chametz through a rabbi before Pesach. However, throughout the intermediate days of Pesach, the storekeeper kept his doors open and openly sold groceries, including chametz, to secular patrons. Following Pesach, are observant consumers permitted to purchase food from this market, or is the entire stock penalized as chametz she'avar alav ha-Pesach (chametz possessed by a Jew over Pesach)?

Answer: Many say that the chametz was never sold.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 348

Yaakov once took his family to a large public burning of Chometz, Yaakov brought a large box filled with many packages of cookies with him. In front of his children, he threw the large box of cookies into the fire. Shortly after the box was thrown in, a Jewish person watching, looked at the box and took it out of the fire. "Why did you take my chametz out of the fire?" Yaakov asked. "These cookies are actually kosher for Passover". The man answered, "I know that my family would appreciate these kosher for Pesach cookies". Yaakov was about to ask the man to return the box, but then felt torn inside. On one hand he wanted to ask the man to give him the cookies back. He thought they were chametz but he was mistaken. Had he known that they were kosher for Pesach he never would have tried to burn them. But on the other hand by throwing the cookies into the fire he was being mafkir them, relinquishing his ownership over them, so maybe he didn't have a right to ask for them back. Yaakov wanted to know if he had a right to ask the man to give the cookies back to him. What do you think?

Answer: Rav Zilberstein writes that the first owner was meyaish, gave up hope of ever getting to back, and so it should belong to the finder. He writes however that it is possible that the minhag, custom would require the finder to return it.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 370

Davis worked as a security guard. His job entailed guarding shipments that arrived in the port, escorting the shipments, and making sure that they arrived at the processing plant safely. He didn't work on Yom Tov itself, but he did work during Chol Ha'moed Pesach. One year, on Chol Ha'moed Pesach he was told that he was to escort a shipment of imported whiskeys. David knew that the whiskeys were chametz. He had no plans to drink the whiskey, and he would likely not even see the whiskey, but he was getting paid to guard and escort chametz on Pesach. He wondered if he was allowed to do that. On one hand, he was benefiting from chametz on Pesach. But on the other hand, the benefit was indirect. He wasn't benefiting from actually drinking or selling the chametz. David was also worried that if he didn't do this assignment, he might be replaced and lose his job permanently. What do you think -- can David guard this shipment?

Answer: Regarding the guard who was instructed to guard chametz on Pesach, Rav Zilberstein answered that he does not have to lose his job, but he should donate all the profit from the job to tzedakah so he doesn't benefit from it.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 309

Yaakov owned a kosher grocery store. Over Pesach, he kept all of his chametz inventory in a separate warehouse near his store. One Pesach, as usual, Yaakov sold all of the chametz in his store and looked forward to spending the Yom Tov with his family. On the second day of Pesach, someone came urgently knocking on his door. There was a small fire in the warehouse where he kept all of his chametz. The fire department was called and they were on their way. All of the chametz merchandise was worth a lot of money and a fire would be a severe financial hardship for Yaakov. Yaakov ran to the warehouse to survey the damage. As he ran, he davened to Hashem with great fervor, that the fire should not spread too much and destroy much of his merchandise. But as he was davening he caught himself. Is he allowed to daven to Hashem that the chametz does not get damaged? If he does that he would be demonstrating openly that he sees himself as the owner of the chametz and that it was not a real sale? Perhaps he was not allowed to daven that the chametz be spared. But on the other hand, perhaps he was allowed to daven. He sold it legitimately and he hoped to buy it back. That was why he was davening. This question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? May Yaakov daven that the chametz in his warehouse not get burned?

Answer: Regarding the question about whether a man could daven that the chametz he sold does not get burned, Rav Zilberstein writes that he should not daven for it as he is demonstrating that he wants the chometz. Please consult with your own Rav regarding any matters of practical halachah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 212 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 226 (Tzav))

The Frankel family sold all of their chometz with their Rav. In their list itemized of chometz that they sold, they included several expensive bottles of perfume. The perfumes were put aside in a drawer and were not used for Pesach. On Pesach, two-year-old Shoshana, ever curious, opened up the drawer. In the drawer, she found the bottles of perfume. When she figured out how to use it, she began to spray herself all over with the perfume. A minute later Shoshana's father found her with a huge smile on her face smelling like the perfume factory from the perennial question in Dayeinu. Shoshana's father wondered if they would have to notify the non-Jew who bought the chametz for the use of the perfume. Would they have to pay him for the use of the perfume because it belonged to him? On one hand, the non-Jew made a down payment on the chometz and he was the owner of the perfume. But on the other hand, the amount of perfume that was used was relatively small and it was hard to put a price tag on what was used. In addition, the non-Jew did not yet pay in full for the chametz. Mr. Frankel brought this question to his Rav. Did they have to notify the Non - about the perfume that was used?

Answer: Regarding the question about the perfume, Rav Dovid Heber answered that it was not necessary to notify the purchaser and no money was owed.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 218

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Raphael Dubzinsky was a pious Jew who lived in a village in Poland, and like so many of his countrymen who were barred from living in the larger cities and from various types of livelihood, Raphael operated an inn which he rented from the local poritz. Raphael was known for his honesty and was respected and loved by all, Jew and Gentile alike. Raphael and his wife were content, but their happiness was marred by their being childless. One time a new priest came to the village, who was a virulent anti-Semite, and Raphael's popularity vexed him no end. He issued an edict that none of his parishioners were permitted to patronize the Jew, but inasmuch as the inn had been a place for drinking and camaraderie for years, the edict went unheeded. Similarly, his pressure on the poritz to revoke Raphael's lease on the inn bore no fruit. Raphael sold his entire supply of beer and spirits to a non-Jew every Pesach, so the priest issued an injunction that no one was permitted to buy the Jew's chametz, under threat of excommunication and eternal damnation. When Pesach arrived and no one wished to buy his chametz, Raphael left the doors to his inn wide open and made a public announcement: "I hereby renounce ownership of all my beer and spirits. Whoever wishes may come in and take it. " He and his wife then left to spend Pesach with relatives, and although he knew that he would now be penniless, Raphael rejoiced during the festival. When he returned home, Raphael asked the first townsfolk whom he met whether everyone had enjoyed all the free drinks. "What do you mean enjoyed free drinks?" they said. "We could not even get close to your place with those vicious dogs you had guarding it." Raphael did not know what they were talking about, — but when he came to the inn, he saw two vicious looking dogs there. The dogs approached him gently, sniffed him, and then took off. Raphael realized that G-d had intervened to protect him from economic ruin. But he had one problem: His chametz had been guarded and thus had remained in his possession over Pesach, and as such he was forbidden to derive any benefit from it. Raphael began opening the spouts of the barrels to dispose of the beer and spirits. His wife screamed at him, "What are you doing? You did what you were supposed to do and divested yourself of ownership of the chametz. You may use it and sell it. Ask the rabbi!" The rabbi ruled that the wife was indeed right. When Raphael opened the doors and left his inn open to all, declaring publicly that all who wished were free to help themselves, he had indeed abandoned ownership of the chametz. The fact that G-d had miraculously protected him did not change things, and he was therefore now permitted to reclaim his former goods. But Raphael was not at peace with himself. "The chametz was in my inn, and if because of a technicality it is halachically permissible, I still do not wish to benefit from it, " and proceeded to pour his entire stock down the drain. When the wife poured out her bitter heart to the rabbi, saying, "Now we are both childless and penniless," the rabbi said, "Have no fear. The virtue of his intense devotion to Torah will merit your having a child whose spirituality will illuminate the world." That year the woman gave birth to a son, who later became the chassidic master, Abraham of Czechanov.

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

14. Not to Find Chametz

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 3

As the Torah says, Seven days leaven shall not be found in your houses (Shemos 12:19, Parshas Bo)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Does one violate this mitzvah for simply leaving chametz in his home over Pesach?
- Can a Jew watch the chametz of a non-Jew during Pesach?
- Would it make a difference if the Jew is financially responsible for it?
- If a Jewish owned store had chametz in the store over Pesach, can one buy that chametz after Pesach?
- What if someone accidentally left chametz in his house, and found it after Pesach, can he eat it after Pesach?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If someone actively leaves chametz in his home on Pesach — for example, if he allows dough to ferment into leaven during the festival and retains it, or if he purchases chametz and willfully brings it into his home — he incurs lashes twice (for violating the prohibition against seeing chametz and the prohibition against finding chametz), because he performed a physical action (ma'aseh).

If, however, he merely allowed chametz to remain in his possession from before Pesach without destroying it, although he continuously transgresses both biblical negative prohibitions noted above, he incurs no court-imposed lashes (malkos), because he performed no active physical deed (lav she'ein bo ma'aseh).

If the chametz of a non-Jew is located on the premises of a Jew, if the Jew accepted financial responsibility (achrayus) for it, he is obligated to destroy it. If he did not accept financial responsibility, there is no prohibition against keeping it in his domain, as Scripture states: "No leavened bread shall be seen for you" (Shemos 13:7) — which Chazal expound: "Yours you may not see, but you may see that of others or of the Sanctuary." If, however, the non-Jew possesses the power under secular law to compel the Jew to pay for it if damaged or lost, it is halachically considered as though he accepted financial responsibility, and he is obligated to eliminate it.

Chametz owned by a Jew that remained in his possession throughout Pesach (chametz she'avar alav haPesach) is rabbinically forbidden for any benefit (assur b'hana'ah) forever as a penalty, because the owner violated the prohibitions against its being seen (bal yera'eh) and found (bal yimatzei). Even if the chametz was left inadvertently or forgotten by accident (b'shogeg), the Sages maintained this strict prohibition.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

15. Not to Eat Chametz Past Midday on Erev Pesach

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 104

As the Torah says, You shall eat no leavened bread over it (Devarim 16:3. Parshas Re'eh)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to eat chametz on the day before Pesach starts?
- At which point in the day must we stop eating chametz on erev chametz?
- Is one allowed to benefit from chametz on Pesach? For example can one feed his or her dog chametz?
- Until when is it permitted to get benefit from chametz on Erev Pesach? Is it the same time as when we have to stop eating chametz?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition establishes that one may not eat chametz during the time designated for the offering of the Pesach sacrifice (Korban Pesach). The biblical window for slaughtering the sacrifice begins at the start of the seventh halachic hour of the day (midday, chatzos). Consequently, whoever eats chametz on the fourteenth of Nissan after six proportional hours have elapsed violates an active biblical negative commandment.

To safeguard this biblical boundary, Chazal instituted protective fences: from the beginning of the sixth halachic hour, both eating chametz and deriving any benefit (hana'ah) from it are rabbinically forbidden. During the fifth halachic hour, eating chametz is already prohibited by rabbinic decree, but deriving benefit from it (such as selling it to a non-Jew or feeding it to animals) remains permissible.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man missed shul on Erev Pesach. He called the shul and asked if he can join the siyum over the phone and listen. Would that work?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein notes that according to Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, the primary exemption from Taanis Bechoros comes from participating in the joy of the siyum itself. While normally one must be physically present, Rav Zilberstein cites Ma'adanei Shlomo in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l that in a pressing situation (b'sha'as ha-dechak) where a firstborn cannot attend in person, he may rely on listening to the live siyum over the telephone to be exempted from the fast.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bechoros, p. 629

16. Not to Eat Chametz on Pesach

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 4

As the Torah says, and no leavened bread shall be eaten (Shemos 13:3, Parshas Bo).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can one feed an animal with animal feed that contains chometz in it?
- The Torah prohibits eating Chometz. Would drinking Chometz based liquids, like beer and whiskey have the same prohibition?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Throughout the seven days of Pesach, it is biblically forbidden to eat chametz or derive any benefit from it whatsoever. If one intentionally eats an olive's volume (kezayis) of chametz on Pesach after receiving proper forewarning, he is liable to spiritual excision (kares); if he ate it unwittingly (b'shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas). If one eats less than a kezayis (chatzi shiur), it remains biblically forbidden, and under rabbinic law he is liable to disciplinary lashes (makas mardus).

The prohibition applies equally whether one eats solid chametz or liquefies, dissolves, and drinks it (shetiyah k'achilah).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Betzalel grew up in America as a Christian. After certain events in his life he decided to convert to Judaism. He went to Israel to study about Judaism and was eventually given a date to finalize the geirus (conversion). It was the day after Pesach. Betzalel's plan was to return to America immediately following his geirus. Betzalel then realized that he was faced with the following question. In America, the place to which he intended to move, his geirus would take place on the last of Pesach. Immediately following his geirus in Israel, did he have to keep that day as Pesach? On one hand we can say that he was never obligated to keep two days because he was never Jewish in chutz la'aretz. On the other hand, however, we can say that he is a ben chutz l'aretz because he was planning to live in America, and should observe that day as Yom Tov. What do you think? Did Betzalel have to keep that eighth day of Pesach, his first day as a Jew?

Answer: Regarding the question of the man who converted, Rav Zilberstein said that if he was not obligated to keep the first day of Yom Tov because he was not yet Jewish, then he is exempt for the second day as well.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 351 (Table Talk Edition 070)

A man goes away for Pesach. His friends rent the house. A chemical company has a door prize, where if they come to the house and you have their cleaning products you can win the prize. The friends who were staying at the house get the prize. However the owner says he should get the prize because it was his house and products. They say that if they were not there he would not have won because no one would be home. Who is legally entitled to the promotional prize awarded on Pesach: the property owner whose products qualified, or the temporary tenants who opened the door to receive it?

Answer: Analyzing the Gemara in Bava Metzia (100b) and Bava Basra (55a, 'andiska siyata d'Shamaya'), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the promotional door prize belongs to the holiday subtenants who opened the door and won the contest. The empty product boxes themselves had no intrinsic prize value without the subtenant being home and answering the company representative's knock; thus, the windfall was a heavenly blessing (siyata d'Shamaya) granted to the subtenant.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Metzia, p. 424

Chaim lived in New York and owned a popular bagel store which offered delivery service. The delivery truck had the logo and name of his bagel store prominently displayed on every side of the truck. Carlos, who was not Jewish, was in charge of deliveries. Since Carlos used the delivery truck most of the day, Chaim let Carlos use the truck for his personal use. Carlos would often take the truck home and would use it for small local errands not related to delivering bagels. One year right before Pesach, as Chaim sold all of his chametz equipment for Pesach, he thought about the delivery truck. He wondered if it was ok for Carlos to drive the bagel delivery truck on Pesach. Even though the truck would be driving around with Carlos who was not Jewish, perhaps it would give the impression to the whole city that Chaim's bagel store was open for business on Pesach. Should Chaim tell Carlos not to use the truck for the duration of Pesach? Carlos would likely be disappointed, but perhaps that is what he needed to do. Or perhaps it would be fine and everyone would assume that it must be the non Jewish driver who was driving around for personal use. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the bagel truck, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered that the non Jewish driver should avoid driving the truck during Pesach.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive

Chaim had a very painful hip condition. It was not life threatening and it could be corrected with surgery. After waiting for some time, Chaim's surgery was scheduled for erev Pesach. This led to the following dilemma. If he got the surgery on erev Pesach he would be on intravenous drip for the Seder nights and not be able to do any of the mitzvos of the Seder such as eating matzah and maror. He had two other options. He could reschedule the surgery for the next available opening, but that would be two months after Pesach and he would have to suffer from his hip condition until that time. Alternatively, he could go to another available doctor who could do the surgery much earlier than Pesach but that doctor does not accept his insurance and the procedure would cost him $50,000. Chaim was unsure which of the three options was best: 1) do the surgery erev Pesach, miss all the Pesach mitzvos, but save $50,000; 2 do the surgery for

no cost two months after Pesach, keep all the Pesach mitzvos but have to suffer great pain; 3 or pay $50,000 to be able to do all the Pesach mitzvos. Chaim wondered if he was obligated to suffer the pain or spend $50,000 in order to fulfill the mitzvos of Pesach? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of whether the man was obligated to endure great pain or pay $50,000 to be able to eat matzah, Rav Zilberstein answered that he was not required to endure great pain, and he was not required to spend a great deal of money if it exceeded more than 20% of his money.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 405

Yaakov lived in Eretz Yisrael. One year he and his family went to be with family in the United States for Pesach. Before Pesach, Yaakov made sure to sell all the chometz in his house, through his Rav. Erev Pesach, a few hours before the final time to sell chometz, Yaakov remembered that he had a large stash of chometz in his office. He had totally forgotten about it and had not sold it. He was about to pick up the phone to ask a local Rav if he could sell that chometz when his wife reminded him of the fact that in Eretz Yisrael, Pesach had already begun. “Yaakov, can we sell the chometz that’s in the office?”, she asked. “In Eretz Yisrael it's already Pesach so the chometz is already Assur Behana’a, you can’t benefit from it. How can we sell that chometz? Is it permissible to sell it now, when we are no longer allowed to benefit from it?” “Good point”, Yaakov told his wife, “but perhaps it doesn't go by where the chometz is, but rather where we are. Perhaps even though the chometz is in Eretz Yisrael, nevertheless, we the owners are in the US, it can still be sold.” The question was eventually brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Can the chometz be sold even though it is already Pesach in Eretz Yisrael?

Answer: Regarding the question of the office snacks that were in Israel and not yet sold, Rav Zilberstein said that regarding this matter, we follow where the owner is located and not where the chometz is located. Therefore if the owner is in the US and there is still time to sell chometz, it can be sold.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 97 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 177 (Pesach))

Menachem owned a grocery store. Before Pesach, he made a wholesale order of two thousand boxes of matzah from a matzah bakery owned by Mr. Krause. After the purchase, he kept all the boxes in a cool warehouse for two weeks and never opened those boxes. Before Pesach he sold the matzah in his store for the retail price. As people purchased their matzah they came back to Menachem and complained that they found small worms in the Matza. Menachem was sure that the worms got into the boxes before he purchased them. He told all his customers to go to Mr. Krause and ask him for the refund. Mr. Krause was sure however that the worms got in after the matzahs were sold. They brought this case before a Din Torah. According to the Torah, who is obligated to refund the customers, Menachem or Mr. Krause?

Answer: Regarding the question of the wormy matzah, Rav Zilberstein wrote that the buyers will be unable to extract their money from the sellers because it is a doubt where the worms developed.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 368 (Table Talk Edition #71 (Parshas Pesach))

During the Holocaust, two pious Jewish prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp miraculously managed to conceal a tiny scrap of shmurah matzah on the night of Pesach. When they weighed the precious fragment, they discovered it amounted to exactly one kezayis (the halachic minimum volume required to fulfill the biblical commandment of achilas matzah). A profound and heartbreaking dilemma arose between them: If they divided the piece equally, each prisoner would eat half a kezayis (chazi shiur)—a noble act of spiritual longing, but one through which neither man would fulfill the biblical mitzvah. Alternatively, if one prisoner ate the entire fragment, that individual would fulfill

the complete, perfect biblical commandment with its accompanying blessing. How should two Jews in a labor camp allocate a single kezayis of matzah—should they split it so both participate, or ensure that at least one Jew fulfills the complete mitzvah? What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that they should not divide the fragment into two sub-halachic portions. Rather, one person should receive the entire kezayis so that the biblical mitzvah of eating matzah is fulfilled in its full, complete halachic perfection. Halachah prioritizes the complete fulfillment of a Torah obligation by one person over two people performing a partial, non-obligatory act (ein chatzi shiur mitzvah d'oraisa). To determine who eats the matzah, one prisoner should either generously forgo his share (mochel) out of love for his fellow Jew, or they should cast a lottery (goral) to let Heaven decide who is granted the privilege of fulfilling the mitzvah. (Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 271)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 271

In extreme wartime circumstances where neither wine nor matzah is available, may one recite Kiddush on bread on Pesach, and does reciting 'Chag HaMatzos' over chametz constitute a halachic contradiction?

Answer: Citing Responsa Ish Matzliach (Vol. 2, Siman 27) and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that when someone in mortal danger (pikuach nefesh) in wartime has no wine or matzah and must sustain his life with bread on Pesach, he recites Kiddush over the bread (since eating is permitted to him for pikuach nefesh) and recites the standard text 'Chag HaMatzos' (or 'Chag HaPesach'), because 'Chag HaMatzos' refers to the sanctity of the festival day itself (analogous to mentioning 'Chag HaSukkos' when rain forces one to recite Kiddush inside the house).

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Sanhedrin, p. 482

Chava was a nurse in a large metropolitan hospital in the United States. She was working her shift during an unusually busy time in the hospital. The hospital was understaffed and nurses were given obligations that they normally did not have to do. Pesach came and Chava had a shift during Chol Hamoed. She was assigned to hand out meals to the patients. Lunch came and the lunch was grilled cheese sandwiches. Seeing the sandwiches, which were obviously chametz, Chava wondered if she was allowed to pick them up, and hand them to the patients. On one hand she wasn't eating them, and she didn't have to assume that the patients were Jewish. But on the other hand, by giving out the sandwiches she was doing her job and thereby benefiting from chametz. Would this be considered benefitting from chametz on Pesach? Is she allowed to pass them their sandwiches on Pesach? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of whether the Jewish nurse can hand out chametz sandwiches on Pesach, Rav Zilberstein answered that it seems that it is not permitted.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 190

The Frankel family had ten children. One of the children, five year old Yehuda, got the afikoman and hid it. When it came time to eat the afikoman, Mr. Frankel played along and searched all over the house for the afikoman. Yehuda played hot and cold with his father and gave him hints as to where it was. Finally, Mr. Frankel got really close to the afikoman and Yehuda revealed that the afikomen matzah was hidden inside the vertical washing machine! All the kids were present as they watched their father react. "Yehuda, you hid it in the washing machine, but the washing machine is muktza, I can't open it", Mr. Frankel said. "Oops", Yehuda said with a grin. All of the children offered their opinion about how they should deal with the situation. One child said, "well it's muktza. We can't open it and we will have to skip the afikoman entirely tonight". Another child said, "it's ok, we can leave the afikoman in the washing machine and use another matza for the afikoman". Another young child said they should walk over to a nearby non-Jew's home and

wake him up. Then they should hint to him that they have matzah in their washing machine and that they would appreciate it if he could get dressed and take the matzah out for them. Another child said that one of them should open the washing machine door with his foot. Another child said they should tell their one and a half-year-old baby to open the door of the washing machine for them. Another child said that they can just open the door of the washing machine normally because it was kli she'melachto l'issur (a lower form of muktzah that can be used on Shabbos and Yomtov when it is needed), and they had a need for it, so they can open the door on Pesach directly. Another child rejected that argument and said that kli she'melachto l' issur can only be used if there was no other permitted vessel available. In this case rather than use the muktzah they should just use another matzah from the box. Which child is correct? What should they do in this case? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the matzah in the washing machine, Rav Zilberstein wrote that it would be permitted for a Jewish adult to open the washing machine directly. This is because a kli shemelachto li'isur in this case is permitted even though they can use other matzah for the afikoman. This is because they want to use this specific matzah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 565 (Table Talk Edition #281 (Parshas Pesach))

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Nachman Seltzer told the following beautiful story: In the heart of Jaffa, where Jews and Arabs have lived side by side for generations, stands the Abu Lafia Bakery, established in 1879. While most bakeries in the area close during Pesach to honor the Jewish prohibition against chametz (leavened bread), Abu Lafia remained open, drawing Jews who weren't observant of these traditions. They came from surrounding neighborhoods, creating traffic jams as they lined up to purchase fresh pita and bread during the eight-day holiday. Across the street from this bakery worked Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Stalber, who owned a shoe factory. Day after day during Pesach, he watched with growing distress as fellow Jews purchased chametz -- a serious violation of Jewish law. For observant Jews like Shlomo Zalman, even seeing bread during Pesach was troubling, let alone witnessing masses of Jews buying and consuming it. In 1969, Shlomo Zalman decided that simply being troubled wasn't enough. He needed to act. He crossed the street to speak with Said Abu Lafia, the bakery's owner and his longtime neighbor. A few weeks before Pesach, he explained the significance of the holiday and why chametz was forbidden. "I don't expect you to close your store for a week just because I asked," Shlomo Zalman said. "You're not Jewish. You have no obligation. But this means so much to me that I'll pay you whatever you would have earned during Pesach if you close the bakery and take your family on vacation." Abu Lafia hesitated. "Do you have any idea how much money I make that week? When most bakeries close, those who want bread come to us. I make more during Pesach than the rest of the year combined!" "I understand," Shlomo replied. "But I'm prepared to pay your full profits. Just name your price." Moved by his neighbor's sincerity, Abu Lafia agreed. They signed a contract, and that Pesach, for the first time, the bakery closed with a sign reading: "The Abu Lafia Bakery blesses the entire Jewish nation with a Chag Kasher V'Sameach." For six years, this arrangement continued. Shlomo Zalman would visit before the holiday, they would calculate the payment, and the bakery would close. Years later, the Stalber family calculated that Shlomo Zalman had paid enough over those six years for Abu Lafia to purchase a four-bedroom apartment in Tel Aviv. But in the seventh year, something changed. "Mr. Shlomo, we're not making the same deal this year," Abu Lafia announced. Concerned, Shlomo Zalman asked why. "Don't worry -- the bakery will still be closed. But from now on, my children and I will keep it closed without taking any money from you." "Why?" Shlomo Zalman asked. "Since I started closing for Pesach, I've seen an incredible increase in our business throughout the year. We've been tremendously blessed. So from now on, I'm doing it for free -- because it's the right thing to do." Both men have since passed away, but the tradition continues. Every Pesach, the bakery -- now run by Abu Lafia's children -- displays a sign blessing the Jewish people with a happy holiday, along with the story of how this tradition began.

Shlomo Zalman exemplified how one person can make a difference: without committees, without publicity, without seeking recognition. He simply asked himself, "What can I do to make this better?" -- and then did it. That's the power of one individual -- an impact that continues even fifty years later.

Table Talk, Edition 436 (Parshas Pesach Ii), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

17. Not to Eat a Mixture of Chametz

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 5

As the Torah says, You shall eat nothing leavened (Shemos 12:20, Parshas Bo)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Does the Torah only prohibit eating bread that is chometz, or is something that has a mixture of chometz ingredients equally forbidden? Would that be the same level of prohibition as eating bread on Pesach?
- How much chometz must be mixed in order to violate this prohibition?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is biblically forbidden to consume a mixture containing chametz (ta'aroves chametz), whether the leaven was intermingled with its own species (min b'mino) or with a different species (min b'she'eino mino). If the mixture contains an olive's volume (kezayis) of chametz within the quantity consumed within the duration of eating half a loaf of bread (k'dei achilas pras), one violates this negative prohibition upon eating it; however, the penalty of excision (kares) is incurred only for consuming pure chametz, not for an ordinary mixture.

Even if the proportion of chametz is less than a kezayis within the span of k'dei achilas pras, consuming the mixture remains strictly forbidden, and one who eats it is liable to rabbinic disciplinary lashes (makas mardus).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Pesach is the time of freedom. Just as we were freed both physically and morally from Egypt thousands of years ago, Pesach allows each one of us to achieve a similar spiritual and moral freedom from the restraints that prevent us from becoming full servants of Hashem. The elimination of chametz helps us to internalize a freedom from the grip of our yetzer hara and we can consequently use that freedom to perfect our middos, our character and become more similar to Hashem.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One of Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky's talmidim related: "Prior to Pesach he was in some doubt as to the kashrus of one of the ingredients of a particular medicine. He made an educated guess based on the substance's Latin name, but not wanting to rely on himself, he took his question to a pharmacist. The pharmacist began searching through his numerous textbooks and after a long while told Reb Yaakov that the preparation did not contain any trace of chametz and could be taken on Pesach. Judging from appearances, however, it seemed that he had not managed to find the information he had looked for

in all his books but was simply too embarrassed to admit that he didn't know... Reb Yaakov commented that this demonstrated to him the difference between-a pharmacist and a Rav. A pharmacist must give an answer and if he doesn't know what it is he invents something... A Rav who renders halachic rulings is different. When the Beis HaLevi was appointed rav of Brisk he was reputed to be a towering scholar, thoroughly knowledgeable in every area of Torah. No sooner had he been appointed mu than a very difficult question was brought before him and instead of giving a ruling he said, "I don't know." The questioners were surprised and left. Curiously, this happened again with the second question he was asked. The community began to feel somewhat disappointed but, for the time being, nobody said anything. After this happened a third time, the laymen held a meeting to discuss the situation. "We heard that the Rav is the genius of the generation in Torah," said one of the notables, "yet it turns out that he can't answer our questions." "Perhaps he's indeed a great scholar," another said, "and could serve as a Rosh Yeshivah and deliver wonderful shiurim but we need a Rav who can rule on our questions." After some further discussion they reached the conclusion that there it was no choice but to ask the new Rav to leave. When the communal leaders came to the Beis HaLevi and expressed their disappointment, he smiled and told them, "Don't worry, raboisai. Be'ezras Hashem I will manage to answer your questions from now on. All I wanted to do was to show both you and myself that if it ever happens that I really don't know the answer, I won't be embarrassed to admit it..."

In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

A. A MITZVAH TO REFRAIN FROM EATING CHAMETZ

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-11

As the Torah says "for seven days you shall eat matzos" (Shemos 12:15, Parshas Bo)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is one obligated to eat matzo for all seven days of Pesach?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

There is a positive commandment to abstain from eating chametz throughout all seven days of Pesach. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 2:1) explains that the verse "Seven days you shall eat matzos" (Shemos 12:15) does not impose an obligatory command to physically eat matzah every single day, since the active obligation to consume a kezayis applies exclusively to the first night of Pesach. Rather, the verse establishes an implied negative: you shall eat matzah, but you shall not eat chametz. It is an established halachic principle that a prohibition derived from a positive command carries the full status of a positive commandment (lav haba miklal aseh, aseh). Consequently, whoever eats chametz on Pesach transgresses not only the biblical negative prohibition (lav) and its severe penalty of spiritual excision (kares), but also violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Tchebiner Rav, Rav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, would often talk about remaining true to our mesorah and not trying to outdo our ancestors and rabbanim A rav once came to daven in Beis Haknesses Chassidim, in Shaarei Chesed. He commented on a particular custom that was practiced in the shul. He argued that one of the Gedolei haPoskim had ruled against the custom, and that the practice should be discontinued. He then read aloud from a sefer to support his opinion.

The Tchebiner Rav, who was learning in the shul at the time, was oblivious to the discussion until he lifted his eyes from his Chumash and noticed the commotion. "What is this argument about?", he asked aloud. One of the congregants explained that the visiting rav had criticized a time-honored custom of the shul. The Tchebiner Rav immediately replied that of course, the shul should continue observing the custom. "We continue following the traditions that we saw our fathers' practice, without swaying one millimeter. Even when venerable poskim rule otherwise, we remain steadfast to our mesorah." Once, when discussing the concept of remaining true to our mesorah and not trying to outdo our ancestors, he related a story: A group of aspiring talmidei chachamim approached the Avnei Nezer and excitedly announced that they had devised a better and more efficient way of baking matzah. They proposed that they use a hollow table to roll the dough on, and to place ice in the hollow beneath the tin on which the matzah was to be rolled. This procedure would cool the temperature of the dough and lessen its chances of leavening. The Avnei Nezer quickly responded: "This is not a takanah; it is a kilkul! It is not an improvement; in fact, it makes things worse. Halachah states that matzah should not be left beside the oven for even a moment because the intensity of the oven heat can cause the matzah to become leavened instantly. Once it is inside the oven there is no reason to fear, because the matzah begins to bake instantly, and does not become leavened. But this is true only as long as the matzah dough retains the temperature specified by the Shulchan Aruch. If the dough is any cooler, it is possible that it will not rise to the proper temperature the second it is inserted into the hot oven. This means that instead of beginning to bake instantly, it will turn to chametz instead."

From Sar Hatorah, The Tchebiner Rav By Chaim Rosenthal, Published by Israel Bookshop

❖ A student who is in awe of his Rabbi when he is in his Rabbi's presence will remember to think and act like his Rebbi even after he leaves his presence. Thus, the halachah requires that at the Pesach seder the men are supposed to recline (heseiba) at certain times to demonstrate that they are truly free and can eat in a relaxed, lounging posture. Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 472:5) rules that a student should sit in awe before his Rabbi, so he may not recline in his presence. Indeed, in this regard, it is considered irreverent to lounge in front of One's teacher. If the Rabbi grants his student special permission, he may recline in his presence. A son, however, may always recline in the presence of his father, even if his father is his Rebbi, because a father usually grants his beloved son permission to do so. The very first Pesach after I married my Rebbi's daughter and became his son-in-law, I sat at his seder table. I asked Rabbi Gifter if I now had the status of his son so that I could recline by the seder. He replied, "Of course I love you like a son, but my primary relationship to you is that of a Rebbi. A student gains tremendously by sitting in awe in the presence of his Rabbi. I do not wish to deprive you of that. If I give up my status of Rebbi toward you, you will be that much poorer. I really don't want you to suffer such a heavy loss, so I think it's better for you not to recline!"

Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

18. To Recount the Exodus from Egypt (Haggadah)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 24

As the Torah says, and you shall tell your son on that day (Shemos 13:8, Parshas Bo).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Should one simply read the haggadah to his child in order to fulfill this obligation?
- Should the retelling of the story be the same with a ten year old as with a fifteen year old?
- What if one has no child, are they exempt from this mitzvah?

- Is it better to say more than just the haggadah?
- Does this only apply to the father or the mother as well?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

On the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, it is a positive commandment to recount the Exodus from Egypt (sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim) to one's children, adapting the narrative to each child's individual temperament and capacity to understand.

Even if a person has no children, he is biblically obligated to relate the miracles and wonders of the Exodus to his wife, his companions, or even to himself if he is alone.

Whoever elaborates extensively upon the Exodus from Egypt and delves deeply into the wondrous miracles of Hashem is exceedingly praiseworthy (harei zeh meshubach).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The story and miracles of the exodus from Egypt teach the foundations of our belief in Hashem in the Torah. This story teaches us our empirical evidence of Hashem's existence, His control over events, the concept of prophecy, and the ideas of reward and punishment. We need to remind ourselves and our family of these messages in order to inspire and recommit ourselves to the goals of the Torah and emulating Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 21)

The story and miracles of Egypt are our empirical evidence of Hashem's existence, His control over events, the concept of prophecy, and the ideas of reward and punishment. This story is the foundation of our belief, and we need to pass this experience down.

SFAS EMES

• One of the Sfas Emes's central Pesach themes is contained in the teaching that the name Pesach means peh sach —"the mouth speaks." He explains: Every mitzvah gives spiritual power (koach) and divine life-force (chiyus) to the limb through which it is performed. Therefore: Sippur repairs speech. The vehicle of the mitzvah is itself one of its purposes. Silent remembrance would not accomplish the same thing. The mouth must participate because the mouth itself was redeemed. This gives the Haggadah an intensely personal meaning. The Jew asks what he does with the gift of speech that Yetzias Mitzrayim restored. The same faculty can complain, embarrass, deceive, gossip, or divide. On Pesach night it is returned to its original dignity as the organ of emunah, Torah, praise, and testimony (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5663).

• The Haggadah declares: "Whoever elaborates in recounting the Exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy." The Sfas Emes reads these words with unusual precision: It does not only mean that the person who tells much is already praiseworthy. He becomes praiseworthy (meshubach) through Sippur. The story acts upon the storyteller. This follows naturally from the previous teachings. If Sippur awakens geulah, increases spiritual awareness (da'as), liberates speech, renews Malchus Shamayim, and prepares the person for Torah, then the narrator cannot emerge

unchanged. The more deeply he enters Yetzias Mitzrayim, the more his own inner order is reshaped by it. This gives special meaning to increasing (marbeh). The mitzvah is therefore reflexive. The Jew tells the story, and the story rebuilds the Jew (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5640).

• The Haggadah famously records how the Tannaim expanded the makkos: ten became fifty, two hundred, and two hundred and fifty. The Sfas Emes does not treat these derashos as merely finding new descriptions for old events. Something deeper occurs through Torah speech. He writes: The Exodus itself comes from potential into actuality through the telling. The historical miracle contained far more than could be visibly perceived when it occurred. Since Yetzias Mitzrayim became a parshah in Torah, it possesses the inexhaustibility of Torah. Hashem performed the miracle. Yet He placed within Torah the possibility that future generations would draw more and more of its inner content into revelation (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5643).

• The Sfas Emes asks why there is no formal blessing over the mitzvah (birkas ha-mitzvah) recited before the Haggadah. His answer reveals something fundamental about Sippur: It is something naturally incumbent upon us even had the Torah not formally commanded it. He illustrates the point with a servant whose master frees him and gives him wealth: A servant who has been liberated naturally praises the one who set him free. The Seder is therefore built upon gratitude (hakaras ha-tov). The obligation is halachic, but the inner response should precede the law. The teller himself lives because of the geulah he describes. Sippur turns historical memory into personal thanksgiving (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5640).

• The Mechilta derives from “for the sake of this” (ba'avur zeh) that the special mitzvah of Sippur belongs to the time when matzah and maror lie before you on the table. The Sfas Emes sees a profound unity between the spoken story and the physical mitzvos. He writes: The light of Yetzias Mitzrayim cannot be fully clarified through speech alone; the concrete mitzvos of matzah and maror provide the spiritual power (koach) through which that light can become revealed. This reflects a larger principle. Spiritual revelation needs a spiritual vessel (kli). The Jewish path does not seek to escape physicality. Hashem gives physical actions and objects through which spiritual light becomes graspable. The story is attached to something physically before him. “This matzah,” “this maror,” “because of this.” The child therefore learns that Yetzias Mitzrayim is not an abstraction. The body eats its symbols, the mouth tells its meaning, and the entire person participates (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5639).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ A person is obligated to occupy himself with the laws of Pesach throughout the entire night of Pesach — even alone with his son, even by himself, and even with his disciple. It once happened that Rabban Gamliel and the Elders were reclining together at the Seder in the house of Boethus ben Zonin in Lydda (Lod), and they were so completely absorbed in expounding the laws of Pesach and the miracles of the Exodus all night long that they continued until the rooster crowed at dawn! Then they raised the table, shook off their garments, and walked together to the study hall (Beis HaMidrash) for the morning prayers.

Tosefta, Pesachim 10:12 (Lieberman)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ On the first day of cheder, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, like other fathers, took each of his sons to cheder for the first time. Most fathers stayed for a short while to help their young sons become acclimated. After about an hour, when all the other parents were already gone, Rav Chaim requested permission to remain in the back of the classroom, learning Torah. "Of course, you are welcome to stay as long as you want," the rebbi responded, "but all the other fathers have already left." Rav

Chaim replied, "But if I leave, my child will cry!" The rebbi responded, "Yes, that's probably true. However, I have found that the children cry only a little bit. I give them a candy, and then everything is fine." Rav Chaim persisted. "I don't want my child to cry even a little bit!" "Fine," said the rebbi. "You may stay, but what will happen tomorrow?" "I'll come back tomorrow," Rav Chaim assured him. "Many of the other parents are not able to learn or perform their jobs here. I can learn the same here as I do in kollel." "And indeed," concluded Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah, who was relating this story, "Abba came back the next day, and the next day, and the next. He learned in the back of my classroom for about a week!" This care and concern that his children should not cry continued with his other sons as well. When Rabbi Shlomo and Rabbi Yitzchak Shaul, respectively, started cheder, Rav Chaim "attended" preschool for approximately four days, remaining and keeping his sons comfortable until they were fully used to this new stage of life and would not cry when he left. Rabbi Shlomo added, "Although Abba spent his time in the back of the cheder room learning his own seder halimud and did not participate in our lessons in any way, he was somewhat attuned to what the rebbi was teaching. For example, my preschool rebbi shared with us a riveting parable about the holiness of a siddur, and for many years, Abba would repeat it—and several other insights he heard from the rebbi—at our Shabbos table in his name."

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

❖ Rav Matisyahu Salomon was a bachur learning in Kfar Chassidim in Eretz Yisrael. He happened to be sitting on a bus when a soldier came and sat down next to him. "You're a traitor," the soldier accused him. Looking at him puzzled, Rav Mattisyahu politely asked, "And why do you say that?" "Well," the soldier replied, "we are out there fighting the enemy and putting our lives on the line while you are sitting and warming the benches in the beis midrash." The young Mattisyahu answered, "If you want, you can call me a fool, but don't call me a traitor." Now it was the soldier who was puzzled. "Huh?" "Let me ask you a question. If one of your fellow soldiers came to the front holding a bow and arrow to fight the enemy, would you call him a traitor or a fool? You would call him a fool. Why is he using old-fashioned weaponry against the enemy? "When the war started, my rosh yeshivah gathered the entire yeshivah together and said, 'You know that we are now at war. We all have to mobilize. We must all accept upon ourselves to learn with even more dedication, not interrupting seder for anything. We also must strengthen ourselves in davening.' We are fighting," Rav Mattisyahu continued. "You may think that we are using old-fashioned tools, which makes us fools according to your calculations, but not traitors!"

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

19. To Count the Sefiras HaOmer

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 26

As the Torah says, and you shall count for yourselves… seven complete weeks (Vayikra 23:15, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- When we count the omer, do we just count the days, or the weeks, or both?
- When do we start counting?
- Can we just count or is a berachah necessary?
- 4 If one counts without a berachah, does he fulfill his obligation?
- What if one tells his friend that today is the eighth day, has he fulfilled his obligation?
- How should one be positioned when he makes this berachah?
- Is that position essential?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Scripture commands: "You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the day of rest... seven complete weeks" (Vayikra 23:15), and further states: "You shall count fifty days" (Vayikra 23:16). From this, Chazal derived that it is a positive commandment to count both the individual days and the cumulative weeks of the Omer.

The counting commences at the very beginning of the night of the sixteenth of Nissan, the evening immediately following the first day of Pesach, directly after nightfall (tzeit hakochavim).

This counting must be preceded by the prescribed blessing (al sefiras ha'omer). If one counted without reciting the blessing, however, he has nevertheless fulfilled his biblical obligation post facto (b'di'eved).

The mitzvah should ideally be performed while standing (me'umad), in accordance with Chazal's exposition of "from the time the sickle is put to the standing crop" (Devarim 16:9). If one counted while seated, he has nonetheless fulfilled his obligation.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, while women are exempt because it is a positive time-bound commandment (mitzvas aseh shehazman grama).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

On Shavuos, the anniversary of the receiving of the Torah, we can once again access a similar spiritual influence that the Jews received when they heard Hashem speak and give the Ten Commandments. That influence helps us to recommit ourselves to learning the Torah and keeping the Torah, which are pathways of emulating Hashem. This is a tremendous spiritual influence that requires intense preparation in order to be properly absorbed and received. The period of sefirah is a period in which we work on correcting our character in order to become fitting receptacles of the great hashpa (influence) of Shavuos. Both the preparation of the sefirah, as well as the hashpa we receive at its culmination, sanctify us to become more similar to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 306)

Counting the omer shows that the purpose of our freedom from Egypt was in order to fulfill the Torah. We count from Pesach until Shavuos to show that the purpose of Pesach was fulfilled on Shavuos when we got the Torah.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:43)

This mitzvah gives respect to the Torah. By counting the days we are expressing our eagerness to receive the influence of Matan Torah again.

CHIZKUNI

Counting seven weeks is a reminder of counting the seven years of shemittah. This recalls to us all of the lessons of the mitzvah of shemittah.

RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI

Just as a woman has to wait seven days of reflection to become pure from nidda and reunite with her husband, also the Jews have to wait seven weeks of reflection before they become pure to receive the Torah and become one with Hashem.

SFAS EMES

• The geulah of Pesach was bestowed on Klal Yisrael before they had acquired its level through their own avodah. For this reason the Sfas Emes interprets "And you shall count for yourselves" (u-sefartem lachem) according to the Zohar as "for yourselves—for your own spiritual refinement." After Hashem drew Israel from Egypt, the people had to clarify and internalize that geulah from within themselves. The distinction is subtle but fundamental. The original geulah remains entirely the gift of Hashem. The person begins by being awakened; he must then work until the awakening becomes his own inner will (ratzon), his own spiritual awareness (da'as), and his own avodah. This is the meaning of "for yourselves" (lachem): the holiness must enter the person so deeply that it can properly be called his (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5636).

• The Sfas Emes gives a deep explanation of the nature of quorum and count (minyan). He writes that the principal countings found in Torah belong to divine unity (achdus): "that counting unites the individual days into one whole." Numbering does not leave the objects as unrelated units; it joins them into one ordered whole. Forty-nine days can pass independently, each disappearing when the next one arrives. Sefirah prevents that fragmentation. Day two contains day one. Through avodah they are counted, ordered, and returned to a single purpose. Thus quorum and count (minyan) itself becomes a form of spiritual rectification (tikkun): the many become one without losing their individual place (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Behar 5641).

• The number forty-nine expresses the full reach of human avodah. The Sfas Emes explains that the forty-nine days of purification are accomplished "through the power of those below and their counting," while the illumination of the fiftieth day belongs to what comes from Above (mi-lema'alah), beyond human power. The structure of the mitzvah thus teaches an exact relationship between avodah and matanah. The Jew must use every faculty that has been placed within his reach. At the same time, when he reaches Shavuos he knows that the fiftieth belongs to the Giver. Human preparation reaches its perfection precisely when it becomes ready to receive what lies beyond itself (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5646).

• The Torah requires two simultaneous counts. We identify the precise day, and at the appropriate points we also identify the completed weeks. The Sfas Emes understands this through general principle and specific detail (klal u-ferat). The individual days represent the details; the weeks represent the larger units into which those details are gathered. Spiritual perfection requires both. A unified whole (klal) without properly rectified individual details (peratim) remains abstract. The Torah to be received at Sinai likewise contains innumerable details while remaining one unified Torah (Torah achas). The dual counting therefore prepares the mind and the soul to perceive unity without erasing detail, and detail without losing unity (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5653).

• The Torah begins the count specifically "from the morrow of the rest day, from the day you bring the Omer of the waving." The first day of Sefirah is therefore inseparable from the Omer offering. The Sfas Emes explains that the purpose of the Omer is "to offer the first-beginning to Hashem." When the beginning is returned to Hashem, everything that follows can remain attached to that root. He writes: The first produce of the new harvest is raised before Hashem, and through this sacred first-beginning (reishis) the entire realm of food can become connected

to kedushah. This is particularly important because food draws the human being deeply into physical existence. The count therefore proceeds from a sanctified first-beginning (reishis). By giving the beginning to Hashem, the Jew establishes the orientation of what follows (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5634).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the idea of true freedom only being achieved with the Torah.

20. Not to Eat Chadash

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 101,102,103

As the Torah says, And you shall eat neither bread nor kali (parched grain) nor karmel (fresh grain) until this very day (Vayikra 23:14, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which types of grains have this prohibition of chadash? Does it apply to rice or corn?
- Which day does the prohibition of chadash end?
- Does it make a difference if the Beis Hamikdash is standing? Why?
- Does the prohibition end later outside of Israel?
- If grain was not yet harvested, but was growing on the seventeenth of Nissan, and it was harvested in the summer, can it be eaten right away, or does it have to wait until the next Pesach?
- Because this is a mitzvah that involves time, would it apply to women?
- Nowadays, are we obligated to be concerned about this prohibition?
- Would it be better to be stringent anyway?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is a biblical negative commandment not to eat bread fashioned from new crop grain (chadash) before the Omer offering was brought in the Beis HaMikdash on the sixteenth of Nissan. It is likewise a distinct negative commandment not to consume kali (parched or roasted grains of the new crop), and an additional negative commandment not to consume karmel (plump kernel grains crushed or rubbed fresh from the ears without roasting) prior to the Omer offering, as Scripture states: "You shall eat neither bread, nor parched grain, nor fresh ears until this very day" (Vayikra 23:14).

This prohibition applies exclusively to the five primary species of grain: wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats. If one consumes an olive's volume (kezayis) of newly harvested bread, an olive's volume of kali, and an olive's volume of karmel prior to the Omer offering, he violates three separate biblical negative commandments.

When the Beis HaMikdash stood, new grain remained forbidden on the sixteenth of Nissan until the offering of the Omer was brought upon the Altar.

In the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, biblical law forbids consuming new grain throughout the entire sixteenth day of Nissan. In the Diaspora, where two Yom Tov days are observed, rabbinic law extends the prohibition across the entire seventeenth day of Nissan as well.

As long as planted grain took root in the earth (hashrashah) before the offering of the Omer — even if it ripened and was harvested only after the Omer — the Omer brings it under its permit and allows it to be consumed.

This prohibition of new grain (chadash) applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

Several prominent Rishonim (early halachic authorities) held that the prohibition of chadash outside Eretz Yisroel was instituted only by rabbinic decree as a protective safeguard, and that the Sages restricted this decree to lands directly bordering Eretz Yisroel. Because of this opinion, the vast majority of Diaspora Jewry has historically not been scrupulous regarding chadash.

While we lack the authority to protest against those who rely on established leniencies, every scrupulously observant Jew (ba'al nefesh) should be stringent with himself wherever feasible, for according to many great Rishonim, chadash outside Eretz Yisroel constitutes a full biblical prohibition in all respects.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah teaches us that when we eat, we should have the frame of mind that we are eating in order to use the energy we derive from the food in order to live lives devoted to perfecting our character and coming close to Hashem. Our eating should be fuel to help us come close to Hashem. Waiting until after Pesach begins to eat from the new crop, is an important reminder of our past slavery and how all of the food and resources that we have now, have come from Hashem in order to be used properly. This mitzvah helps us to elevate our food to becoming a vehicle to help perfect ourselves and come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 303)

One should bring a korban to Hashem to thank Hashem, and acknowledge that the food comes from Him before using the new crop. This mitzvah is similar to making a berachah before eating from food.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

We have to go through the experience of Pesach before we use the new crop. This reminds us that we didn't always have these fields and we used to be slaves. This makes us appreciative of our grain. The mitzvah of Chadash helps us to realize that our food comes from Hashem, and that we will use it to serve Hashem.

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss why it is important to appreciate that our food comes from Hashem
- Discuss why many people are not careful about this mitzvah nowadays

SHAVUOS: THE GIVING OF THE TORAH

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to observing Shavuos, a holiday that reminds us of the unique Divine Revelation of the Torah, as well as fill us with a sanctifying influence that inspires us to learn and observe the Torah.

21. To Rest on Shavuos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 28

As the Torah says And you shall proclaim on the self same day a holy convocation (Vayikra 23:21, Parshas Emor).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss the uniqueness of the revelation on Har Sinai, and how this is one of the pieces of evidence for the Divinity of the Torah.
- Discuss how this story cannot be fabricated, and as a consequence a claim of a mass revelation has not been replicated by any other religion.
- Discuss why there are no special mitzvos for Shavuos.
- Discuss why Shavuos is not mentioned as the day of Matan Toraseinu in the Torah.
- Discuss why Shavuos is shorter than the other Regalim.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Shavuos is a time to remember the experience of the revelation of Har Sinai. This was an unprecedented experience that empirically established for the Jewish people that the Torah came from Hashem and that Moshe Rabbeinu was a true prophet. This memory is the very basis of the Torah that strives to perfect our character, because it reminds us of the Torah's Divine origin and its Divine mandate.

In addition, when we observe Shavuos, we can access the same incredible influence that our ancestors did, and that influence can help us to learn Torah and commit ourselves to the Torah, which will make us resemble Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Gemara describes Moshe defending humanity's right to Torah against the angels. One of his arguments is devastatingly simple: Do you have a yetzer hara? At first this seems strange. One might have argued that angels deserve Torah more because they are purer. Moshe argues almost the opposite. Torah is needed precisely by beings who struggle. The Sfas Emes develops this into a profound distinction between angels and humans. Angels are standing (omdim). They remain essentially at the spiritual level assigned to them. Human beings can fall, but because they can fall, they can also rise. But the capacity to confront imperfection and become different is uniquely human. Torah belongs in that struggle (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5656).

• The Gemara says: Even the opinion that allows Yom Tov to be devoted entirely to spiritual service agrees that Shavuos must include "for yourselves" (lachem), physical enjoyment. Why should the celebration of Torah require eating? The Sfas Emes answers that this is precisely the point of Torah. The neshamah comes from above. The body belongs to the physical world. Without a mediating structure, body and soul can appear to have incompatible goals. The body seeks physical survival and pleasure; the soul seeks attachment to Hashem. Torah creates the path on which they can live together. The body must participate in the celebration because Matan Torah is the event that makes sanctified bodily life possible. True freedom emerges when body and soul no longer need to function as enemies (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5651).

• If Torah is given annually, what exactly is being given? The Sfas Emes answers that the renewal takes place in the portion of Torah accessible to each soul. Chazal teach that future prophets received the root of their prophecy at Sinai. The Sfas Emes extends that principle to Torah learning generally. He writes: Every year, each Jew receives on Shavuos what he is destined to understand and reveal in Torah during that year. Torah allows his distinctive spiritual identity to emerge. Shavuos is therefore the annual day on which the Jew receives not only "the Torah," but the Torah he is capable of bringing into the world (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5635).

• The Mishnah says, Beloved are Israel, for a precious instrument was given to them; an additional love was made known to them through the giving of that precious instrument. The Sfas Emes asks what the "additional love" is. If the first phrase already says that Torah was given to Israel, what is added by the second? His answer is subtle. Hashem did not only give Torah. He gave Klal Yisrael an inner capacity for attachment to Torah and for receiving it. A gift is useful only if the recipient possesses the ability to receive it. A brilliant lecture means little to a listener who cannot understand its language. Shavuos repairs both sides of the encounter (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5640).

• The most obvious meaning of Shavuos is "weeks," referring to the seven weeks counted from Pesach. The Sfas Emes hears another word inside the name: oath (shevu'ah). He writes: The festival is called Shavuos because of the oath established at Sinai. But the covenant contains two oaths. Israel binds itself to Hashem through "we will do and we will hear" (na'aseh v'nishma). The nation agrees to serve before demanding complete understanding. Hashem, in turn, binds Himself to Israel through "I am Hashem your God" (Anochi Hashem Elokecha) and through choosing them as His covenantal people. Shavuos is therefore an annual renewal of covenant. The Jew is not only receiving information; he is entering again into a relationship of mutual commitment (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5663).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Shimshon who was 6 years old asked his father if he could learn with him Shavuos night. His father said no, because he was too young. Shimshon cried, but his father didn't change his mind. When his father finally left, he saw Shimshon's heartbroken face looking out the window. As he walked toward shul, the image of his son's tearful face stayed in his mind, and he decided to go back and bring him along to learn. When he walked back through the door, he found little Shimshon wearing his coat and completely ready to go. It looked like he was expecting him. Why are you all dressed. The six year old innocently said "I knew that you would come back. I davened to Hashem really hard for you to come back and I knew that he would listen". Shimshon grew up to be Rabbi Shimshon Pincus who helped define the principle that when you turn to Hashem he listens.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 161

❖ The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Avraham Ausband's avodas hatefillah was legendary. An average weekday Shemoneh Esrei could take twenty minutes, and not only in Yeshiva. A number of years ago, Rav Avrohom was scheduled to be the second speaker at a major Chayeinu asifah before Shavuos. The Rosh Yeshivah arrived a little early, and a minyan for Maariv was arranged in the side room. The minyan finished as the first speaker was winding down, but Rav Avrohom was still standing in tefillah before his Master. Shemoneh Esrei was followed by a slow, deliberate Sefiras Haomer, and then Aleinu, each word enunciated slowly and meticulously. As he finished the final words, the first speaker concluded. The Rosh Yeshivah strode up to the podium exactly on time.

From Chayeinu Magazine

❖ One Shavuos morning, Reb Eliyahu Chaim Helfan noticed Mordechai Gifter and a friend taking a walk. Reb Eliyahu Chaim asked them why they were not learning, to which they replied, "Genug gelernt. [We learned enough]" After all, they had been up the whole night learning. Reb Eliyahu Chaim replied, "Ah shiker zugt kein mohl nit genug bronfin getrunkin. [A drunkard never says he drank enough whiskey.]" Reb Eliyahu Chaim was pointing out the importance of constant learning and always wanting to learn more!

Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

22. Not to Desecrate Shavuos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 149

As the Torah says, And you shall proclaim on this very day: it shall be a holy convocation unto you; you shall do no laborious work' (Vayikra 23:21, Parshas Emor).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Shavuos is a time to remember the experience of the revelation of Har Sinai. This was an unprecedented experience that empirically established for the Jewish people that the Torah came from Hashem and that Moshe Rabbeinu was a true prophet. This memory is the very basis of the Torah that strives to perfect our character, because it reminds us of

the Torah's Divine origin and its Divine mandate.

In addition, when we observe Shavuos, we can access the same incredible influence that our ancestors did, and that influence can help us to learn Torah and commit ourselves to the Torah, which will make us resemble Hashem.

SUCCOS: SHELTERING BENEATH THE WINGS OF FAITH

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to observing Succos, a holiday that reminds us of Hashem's constant protection over us, and fills us with a sanctifying influence that inspires us to trust and love Hashem.

23. To Rest on Succos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 34

As the Torah says, On the first day, a holy convocation (Vayikra 23:35, Parshas Emor).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic laws governing the first day of Succos are identical to those of the first day of Pesach regarding the cessation of prohibited labor and the permission of food preparation (see Positive Commandment §25). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss meaning of succos for us today, how just as Hashem protected us then he continues to care for us today.
- Discuss the how Succos is the culmination of the cycle of the three pilgrimages, as well as the Yamim Noraim, the High Holy days Discuss how those two circles intersect and what their relationship is.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Succos is a time in which we recall that just as Hashem took care of our ancestors in the desert, it is only Hashem, not our money and resources who takes care of us today. Succos fills us with a hashpa, a spiritual influence that helps us to trust, and so love Hashem.

Succos is during the harvest time. This is an opportune time when we pledge with the lulav and esrog to unitedly use our resources (received by the harvest) and our lives to serve Hashem. These mitzvos help us to develop the qualities of love, and trust in Hashem, and a resolution to keep the mitzvos which help to perfect our character.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• Why does the call to return continue after forgiveness? The Sfas Emes finds the answer in the pasuk, I have erased your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a cloud; return to Me. The invitation to return comes after the removal of the sins. A person may first do teshuvah because he fears punishment or fears the damage that his sins have done to his soul. The first return removes the separation that conceals love; the revealed

love then brings a deeper repair. The verse "love covers all transgressions" becomes an explanation of the protection of the sukkah. We celebrate Sukkos because the forgiven person is invited into this further avodah: to seek Hashem with love and joy (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5662).

• The Midrash applies "and a newly created people shall praise Hashem" (ve-am nivra yehalleil Kah) to the renewal of Klal Yisrael through the Yamim Noraim. The Sfas Emes explains that this renewal includes the return of spiritual life that sin had caused to withdraw. He speaks of soul (nefesh), spirit (ruach), and higher soul (neshamah), levels of the soul, and relates the three regalim to their revelation. Pesach brings redemption at the level of nefesh, Shavuos brings the gift of Torah at the level of ruach, and Sukkos brings an illumination of neshamah. The gift therefore carries responsibility. The renewed spiritual life must be received and guarded through the way a person lives (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5658).

• The Torah calls Sukkos the Festival of Ingathering (Chag HaAsif), and says, when you gather your labors from the field. The Sfas Emes explains the harvest in relation to world (olam), time and the yearly cycle (shanah), and soul (nefesh): the world, time, and the person. Just as the fruits grown during the year are now gathered, so the deeds of a person's year reach a season of spiritual ingathering. Every deed must be directed toward Hashem. When deeds are planted in their proper place, they bear fruit, and Sukkos brings this process to its completion. Sukkos thus joins the year that has ended to the year that is beginning. It gives a person an avodah of collecting his life: bringing his deeds, desires, and efforts into a common direction before Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5637).

• If Sukkos recalls the shelter that followed the departure from Mitzrayim, why does it come after Shavuos? The Sfas Emes explains this order through the words "In order that your generations may know" (lema'an yede'u). Their first willingness to follow Hashem preceded their full understanding. He describes this as a sign of exceptional love: they followed before they possessed complete spiritual awareness (da'as ha-sheleimah). Later, through Torah, they could look back and understand the redemption and the journeys that they had already experienced. The festival gives a Jew an opportunity to understand more clearly the relationship into which redemption brought him. The first readiness to follow and the later understanding are both precious, and Sukkos brings the latter to renewed expression (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5649).

• The joy of Sukkos reaches beyond Klal Yisrael. The Sfas Emes explains that the three regalim express a progression in the work of spiritual rectification (tikkun), bringing creation toward the fulfillment of its purpose. Pesach separates Klal Yisrael from error, Shavuos gives Torah, and through Torah the people are then called to repair and bring close the nations as well. This explains the seventy bulls offered on Sukkos for the seventy nations. Sukkos is therefore a foretaste of the World to Come (me'ein Olam HaBa). Its joy expresses both the closeness already given and the wider repair toward which Torah directs that closeness (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5657).

SFAS EMES — HOSHANA RABBAH

• The movement from the awe of the Yamim Noraim to the joy of Sukkos reveals something about the nature of reverent awe (yirah). The Sfas Emes writes, true yirah gives birth to joy. When reverence brings a person into a faithful relationship with Hashem, that relationship becomes a source of gladness. He illustrates this through Yitzchak Avinu. Yitzchak is associated with dread and awe (pachad), yet his name expresses laughter and joy. The name reveals that his awe was true and therefore could produce joy. Rejoicing in closeness to Hashem should

deepen his reverence for the One before Whom he rejoices. The festival therefore gives the avodah of the Yamim Noraim its next expression, while keeping that avodah alive within the celebration (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5643).

• Pesach and Sukkos both reveal Hashem's kindness, yet the Sfas Emes distinguishes the way that kindness is received. The redemption from Mitzrayim began through Hashem's chesed, when Klal Yisrael had not yet earned the deliverance through their own deeds. Hashem desired that they should then respond to His kindness with avodah, so that the relationship could become enduring. Their willingness to follow Him into the wilderness gave expression to that response. The same order returns each year. The kindness of Pesach enables a person to serve Hashem; the judgment of Rosh Hashanah examines the deeds that followed; and Sukkos reveals "lovingkindness that emerges through strict justice itself." Yet even this ability to earn is part of Hashem's chesed: He arranges that a person should merit His kindness through his deeds. Sukkos celebrates this joining of Divine giving and human response, through which the kindness can take lasting root (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5637).

• If Sukkos recalls the shelter that followed the departure from Mitzrayim, why does it come after Shavuos? The Sfas Emes explains this order through the words "In order that your generations may know" (lema'an yede'u). Their first willingness to follow Hashem preceded their full understanding. He describes this as a sign of exceptional love: they followed before they possessed complete spiritual awareness (da'as ha-sheleimah). Later, through Torah, they could look back and understand the redemption and the journeys that they had already experienced. The festival gives a Jew an opportunity to understand more clearly the relationship into which redemption brought him. The first readiness to follow and the later understanding are both precious, and Sukkos brings the latter to renewed expression (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5649).

• The Sfas Emes explains that the purpose of leaving Mitzrayim was that Hashem should dwell among Klal Yisrael. Sukkos reveals this purpose through a renewed indwelling of the Divine Presence (hashra'as ha-Shechinah). He compares the sukkah with the Mishkan. The command to build the Mishkan after Yom Kippur bore witness to forgiveness for the sin of the eigel: Hashem again placed His Shechinah among the people. Each year, the sukkah likewise bears witness to the forgiveness of Yom Kippur, since Hashem's Name rests upon it. Sukkos celebrates the destination of the earlier stages. Freedom and Torah prepare a people whose life can become a place for the Shechinah (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Va'eira 5650).

• Chazal teach that on Sukkos the world is judged concerning water, and that Hashem says, "Pour out water before Me on the festival of Sukkos" so that the rains of the year will be blessed. The Sfas Emes explains the place of human avodah in receiving this blessing. At the beginning of creation, rain awaited the human being who would recognize its need and pray for it. Rain thus expresses a relationship between Hashem's giving and an awakening from below. The avodah of Klal Yisrael on Sukkos participates in that relationship. Through prayer and nisuch hamayim, the pouring of water on the mizbe'ach, earthly water is raised toward Hashem as the people seek blessing from Him. The festival therefore carries responsibility for the world's life. The water upon which creation depends becomes the subject of recognition, prayer, and service before its Giver (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5654).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, renowned for his wisdom, compassion, and deep dedication to mitzvos, once had a guest visit during the Yom Tov of Sukkos. It was a particularly cold evening, and the wind that swept through the streets of Vilna carried a biting chill. Sitting in the sukkah was challenging, and Rav Chaim Ozer, known to be physically sensitive to the cold, explained to his guest that he was halachically exempt from the mitzvah of sukkah due to the discomfort. "Since the Torah does not demand that we suffer through the mitzvah," he explained gently, "I am permitted to fulfill the mitzvah indoors." With that, the great sage excused himself and went inside to find warmth. A few minutes later, however, to the surprise of the guest, Rav Chaim Ozer reemerged from the house. The cold still hung heavy in the air, but Rav Chaim Ozer was now wrapped in his warm overcoat. He approached the sukkah with a smile that radiated warmth, despite the weather. "I may be exempt from sitting in the sukkah," he said kindly, "but I am not exempt from hachnasas orchim -- the mitzvah of welcoming guests." Without hesitation, Rav Chaim Ozer sat in the succah with his guest. He made sure his guest was comfortable, offering food and conversation with joy and sincerity. Although Rav Chaim Ozer could have stayed indoors, he chose to return to the sukkah, braving the cold -- not for his own sake, but to ensure his guest felt honored and welcomed.

Table Talk, Edition 411 (Parshas Succos), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ In his quest to live by the simple, unadulterated truth, Reb Shmuel Auerbach worked to divest himself of the corrupting influences of personal interest and ulterior motives. He strove to be what Dovid Hamelech calls a “neki kapayim ubar leivav—one of clean hands and pure heart," concerned only with following Hashem's will. On the last erev Yom Kippur of Reb Shmuel's life, a close talmid told him about a well-known American philanthropist who was then visiting Eretz Yisroel, whom he suggested the Rosh Yeshivah should meet on behalf of his network of kollelim. Reb Shmuel agreed and took down the man's address. "On erev Sukkos," says the talmid, "when I asked Reb Shmuel's gabbai what had happened, he was evasive at first. But when I pressed him, he explained sheepishly: 'On erev Yom Kippur shortly before the seudah hamafsekes, Reb Shmuel went to see this person. He was visibly moved, and exclaimed, "The Rosh Yeshivah came to my home at a time like this?!" "It was clearly an opportune moment to request help for the kollelim. But instead, Reb Shmuel said to him, "There's a chassidishe rebbe who is building a shul here and he's a hundred thousand dollars short to complete the structure. Can you lend him the money if I'll be the guarantor?" Inwardly, the fellow breathed a sigh of relief, more than happy to get off easily with a loan of that size, especially with Reb Shmuel as guarantor." "I was very upset," the talmid continues, "This was a chassidishe rebbe with no prior connection to Reb Shmuel, while our own mosdos were in desperate straits. I went to him on Sukkos and asked, 'Why, Rosh Yeshivah? Why?' He looked at me with complete equanimity and said, 'A person needs to be naki, free of ulterior motives. When a Jew asks me for a tovah, nekius demands that I help him."

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

❖ One year during a Succos Yom Tov seudah, the Chazon Ish related the following story to Rav Chaim Kanievsky: "A bachur would often come to my home for no reason other than curiosity. He wanted to see who was coming to visit and hear what was being discussed. He often caused disturbances when I was learning or speaking to the many people who sought guidance. "I tried to discourage the bachur from coming, but to no avail. Finally, I told him that when people seek shidduch information about him, I will have a real dilemma. How could I offer positive information when the bachur wasted hours of his own time in my apartment for no good reason? "This warning accomplished nothing, and the bachur continued his frequent visits. "In time, the father of a young lady came to ask me for information about this bachur. "How is he in learning?" the father asked. "It could be better," I responded. "What about his davening?" "It could be better." "How is his bein adam la'chaveiro (interpersonal relationships)?" "It could be better." "Everyone could be better!" the man exclaimed.

"I myself could improve!" "In short order, the man's daughter became engaged to that bachur!" The Chazon Ish concluded that when a shidduch is meant to be, nothing can stop it. Despite hearing negative information (from none other than the Chazon Ish!), this man allowed his daughter to meet the young man and ultimately become engaged to him.

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

24. Not to Desecrate Succos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 153

As the Torah says, On the first day… you shall do no laborious work (Vayikra 23:35, Parshas Emor)

This mitzvah applies everywhere and always, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Succos, the Chag Ha'asif, the Harvest Festival, is a time in which we recall that just as Hashem took care of our ancestors in the desert, it is only Hashem, not our money and resources (harvest) who takes care of us today. Succos fills us with a hashpa, a spiritual influence that helps us to trust, and so love Hashem.

Succos is during the harvest time. This is an opportune time when we pledge with the lulav and esrog to unitedly use our resources (received by the harvest) and our lives to serve Hashem. These mitzvos help us to develop the qualities of love, and trust in Hashem, and a resolution to keep the mitzvos which help to perfect our character.

25. To Live in a Sukkah During Succos

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 35

As the Torah says, You shall dwell in booths seven days (Vayikra 23:42, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the meaning of the requirement to live in a succa for seven days?
- Does it only apply to the daytime?
- What should one's relationship to his home be during Succos?
- Is one allowed to eat a large meal with bread outside of a sukkah?
- Is one obligated to make a meal with bread in his sukkah every day?
- Is there any day that you are obligated to have a meal with bread?
- Can one eat fruit or vegetables or drinks outside of a succa?
- Do children have to eat their meals in a sukkah? How old should they begin?
- Are women obligated to eat in a sukkah?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Throughout all seven days of the festival, a person is commanded to eat, drink, and reside in the sukkah, both by day and by night.

During all seven days, a person must make his permanent home an occasional dwelling (diras arai) and establish his sukkah as his primary, fixed residence (diras keva).

It is strictly forbidden to eat an established meal (seudas keva) outside the sukkah.

On the first night of the festival, it is an absolute obligation to eat at least an olive's volume (kezayis) of bread in the sukkah.

From that point onward throughout the remainder of the festival, if one chooses to eat bread, he must eat it in the sukkah; however, if he wishes to eat fruits or light snacks, he may eat them outside the sukkah.

A young child who has reached the age of training in mitzvos (chinuch) is obligated to dwell in the sukkah by rabbinic law.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The sukkah is a reminder that helps us recall that just as Hashem took care of our ancestors in succos in the desert, it is only Hashem, not our money and resources who takes care of us today. The sukkah therefore fills us with a hashpa, a spiritual influence that helps us to trust, and so love Hashem. That trust and love in Hashem, inspires us to devote our lives to perfecting our character with the mitzvos and so come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:43)

We should remember the difficult times when we had no homes, in a time when we have homes. This helps us to appreciate Hashem, as well as helps us to stay humble by recalling our humble beginnings.

RASHBAM

During a harvest, it is easy to feel "kochi veotzem yadi", that this harvest is because of my own strength and skill. We go into a hut to remember the times when we had nothing and all that we have now is a gift from Hashem.

RAMBAN (IBID.)

This mitzvah helps us to remember the fact that because Hashem's presence was with our ancestors, they didn't lack anything even in a desolate desert. The same can apply to us.

RALBAG

This mitzvah helps us to remember the great miracle that Hashem did by protecting us in the desert. This shows Hashem's power.

In addition, this reminds us of the fact that Hashem takes care of those who are close to him. Just as Hashem cared for the Jewish nation who was close to him when they lived in the desert, so is it true for all who are close to Him.

ABARBANEL

This mitzvah helps us to remember that we used to be wandering nomads. This prevents us from becoming arrogant, and increases our love and appreciation for Hashem.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH — CHOREV (CHAPTER 30)

During a harvest a person may either be successful and feel "kochi veotzem yadi", or be unsuccessful and be worried about the upcoming winter. To both people Hashem wants them to remember how Hashem protected the Bnei Yisrael in the desert, and continues to protect them. Don't put too much confidence or concern with the size of the harvest. Hashem can protect you in either case just as he did to the Jews in the desert.

RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI

Just as Hashem took the Jewish people under his wings with the clouds of glory as soon as they purified themselves from the impurities of Egypt, so too, when we leave the impurities of our sins and purify ourselves after Yom Kippur we once again reenter the clouds of glory.

RAMBAM

Trying to emulate the faith of our ancestor Avraham, we demonstrate that we are willing to leave a beautiful home for a small frail hut, because of our great faith in Hashem. We have inherited this ability from our ancestors.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

The way that lulav and succa are mekabel the hashpa of succos is the following. The annanei hakovod that surrounded Klal Yisrael in the midbar had two effects.

It protected them.

It gave Klal Yisrael a light that separated them from the other nations and raised them out of materialism and they thereby became the highest nation on earth spiritually. This happened to them and its result affected all other generations that they were also separated and raised above the other nations. That haara that raised them above the chomer is renewed on succos.

SFAS EMES

• One of the Sfas Emes's most striking teachings is: Sin dislodges a person from the spiritual position where he once stood. After Teshuvah he cannot pretend that nothing happened, and his renewed closeness cannot be explained only by what he has earned through his deeds. The Baal Teshuvah learns that from his own independent standing (mi-tzad atzmo), he has no place. Hashem therefore gives him a sacred place (makom)

from above, and that place is the Sukkah. The Ushpizin belong naturally to this picture: the person who felt spiritually impoverished is raised—as the verse says, "He lifts the needy from the ash-heap, to seat them with nobles"—to sit in the company of the holy ones (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5636).

• The Sfas Emes compares the Sukkah to a bridal canopy (chuppah)—the canopy that completes the bond between husband and wife. At Yetziat Mitzrayim, Klal Yisrael became Hashem's special possession, as the Torah says "this people whom You acquired" (am zu kanisa). Yet a spiritual acquisition (kinyan) reaches its fullest expression when the bride enters the home of the groom. The Sfas Emes therefore reads the words concerning Yaakov, "and for his livestock he made booths (sukkos)" (u-le-mikneihu asah sukkos) as a hint to the Jewish people, Hashem's spiritual acquisition (kinyan). This also gives deeper meaning to the Sukkah: it is a space of closeness in which the relationship becomes settled and protected. A Jew enters it after the Yamim Noraim as one who has been brought again into the intimate household of Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5634).

• The Zohar calls the Sukkah the shade of faith (tzila de-meheimnusa). The Sfas Emes explains this through an unusually deep understanding of free will (bechirah). Hashem gives a person free choice, yet one of the highest uses of that freedom is to choose to place himself beneath Hashem's guidance. This does not mean abandoning responsibility. It means recognizing that the safest and truest path is to ask Hashem to lead him on a straight, upright path (be-orach mishor). The generation of the Exodus entered the desert with this faith: "your following after Me in the wilderness" (lechteich acharai ba-midbar). After Yom Kippur, when the Jew has again been released from the hold of sin, he makes the same choice. He enters the Sukkah and says in action: "In His shadow I delighted and sat" (be-tzilo chamadti ve-yashavti)—I want to live beneath Your divine governance (hanhagah) (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5635).

• The Torah calls Sukkos the Festival of Ingathering (Chag HaAsif). Ordinarily, this refers to the farmer bringing the year's produce from the field into his home. The Sfas Emes turns the image upward: As man gathers what belongs to him into his house, Hashem gathers those who belong to Him into His house. The Sukkah is therefore described as the house of the Omnipresent (beiso shel Makom). Its smallness is irrelevant; spiritually it is the private chamber into which Hashem invites His people. This explains the special sweetness of "Praiseworthy are those who dwell in Your house" (Ashrei yoshvei veisecha). The mitzvah gives a Jew the experience of being gathered home to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5635).

• The Sfas Emes states this reason directly: "the mitzvah of the sukkah embodies trust in Hashem." The timing at the harvest makes the lesson especially powerful. A person has just gathered his produce into his house. The Sfas Emes explains: "not to trust in wealth and possessions, but to trust solely in Hashem." The problem is not possessing a house or property; the danger is imagining that they are the true source of security. The Jew therefore leaves them for seven days and places himself beneath a much simpler roof. This creates the joy of Succos, because "there is no joy like the joy of one who truly trusts in Hashem." A person who knows that his life rests in Hashem's hands can possess wealth without being possessed by it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5645).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- What is wrong with feeling "Kochi Veotzem Yadi"?
- What is wrong with putting too much confidence in our income and harvest?

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Four yeshivah roommates pooled their funds, purchased building materials, and built a large, beautiful sukkah together, becoming full equal partners (shutfim) in its ownership and use. On the first night of Sukkos, after a joyful Yom Tov meal, all four went to sleep in the sukkah. Soon, however, one of the roommates began to snore with such thunderous, deafening volume that the other three found it completely impossible to fall asleep. Suffering tremendous sleep deprivation (mitzta'er), the three roommates had no choice but to take their pillows and blankets inside to sleep in the apartment. The next evening, the three roommates approached the snorer: "It isn't fair for your snoring to drive three people out of our shared sukkah. You should sleep inside the apartment so that the majority of the partners can fulfill the mitzvah of sleeping in the sukkah!" The snorer vigorously objected: "Halachah states that someone who is suffering from discomfort (mitzta'er) is exempt from the sukkah. You three are mitzta'er, so you are halachically exempt from sleeping here. But I sleep like a baby—I am not mitzta'er at all, so I have a full, binding Torah obligation to sleep in the sukkah! How can you demand that someone who is obligated in the mitzvah leave to make room for people whom the Torah has already exempted?" Who has the legal right to the sukkah? What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the three roommates have the halachic right to require the snoring partner to sleep inside the apartment. Under the laws of partnership (dinei shutafus), when individuals enter into a partnership to build a sukkah, the agreement is based on an implicit, foundational condition that all partners will be able to utilize the sukkah for its primary intended purpose. An umdena d'muchsach (an absolute legal presumption) exists that the three roommates would never have agreed to enter into a partnership that would effectively banish them from their own sukkah and prevent them from fulfilling the mitzvah of hiddur. Because the fourth partner's snoring creates an unbearable nuisance that invalidates the very premise of their joint venture, the three partners may demand that he sleep indoors so the majority can fulfill the mitzvah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 486

Avi had a burger restaurant in Eretz Yisrael. The restaurant was in a strip mall that had many stores and many other food establishments. In honor of Succos, Avi built a very large succah in his parking spots, to accommodate the customers who would eat in his restaurant. He was also happy to share his succah with the patrons of the other restaurants in the area. Since Avi made a succah, the other restaurant owners did not make their own succahs as they presumably, relied on Avi's large succah. On Chol Hamoed Succos, many customers came to Avi's restaurant and his succah. Avi was glad to accommodate them. Then a man walked in holding a plate of food and a sandwich. Avi recognized the plate and food as one of the menu items of a treif restaurant in the strip mall. When Avi looked a bit closer at the sandwich, however, he blanched. It looked like a ham sandwich. Avi turned to the man. "Excuse me, is that a ham sandwich?" The man replied, "Yes as a matter of fact it is. You might be asking why I would want to eat a ham sandwich in a succah. Well, there are other foods on my plate that are not ham. I want to get the mitzvah of succah for those foods. In addition, you are supposed to live in a succah the way you do at home. At home, I eat ham, so I do the same in a succah". "Is this a problem for you?" the man asked. All my food is cold and I won't let the food touch any of your tables or chairs. I will also not offer my food to anyone else. Avi wasn't sure how to reply. This was the first time such a thing happened. The man was clearly a bit knowledgeable about some halachah and it was so sad that he was eating treif. Perhaps he made a good point, just because he was doing one aveirah does not mean that he can't eat the other food in the succah. But on the other hand, how could Avi let someone eat ham in his succah, wasn't that a disgrace to the succah? What do you think? Should Avi allow the man to eat in his succah or not?

Answer: Regarding the question about the ham in the succah, Rav Zilberstein writes that the halachah is that one is not allowed to have a bathroom in a succah. The gemarah says that a pig has the status of a graf shel rei, a chamber pot. In addition, the mishna berura writes that one should not bring "forbidden things" into a succah. Therefore the man should not bring the ham into the succah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Vayikra, p. 402

Akiva and his family lived in an apartment building in New York City. They didn't have a backyard and the only place they were able to place their succah was on their small balcony. The balcony had just enough space to build a small succah. There is a mitzvah to sleep in the succah, so after their meals were over Akiva would take out the dining room table and replace it with a mattress on which he would sleep. Things were perfect until Akiva's oldest son Eli became bar mitzvah. Eli wanted to follow his father's lead and do the mitzvah of sleeping in a succah. There was however a problem. There was only enough space in the succah for one mattress. Eli suggested, "Abba why don't you take out the mattress and we can sleep on the floor with blankets? That will be less comfortable but there will be room for both of us to sleep". His father replied, "I don't think it would be a proper fulfilment of the mitzvah for us to choose to sleep in an uncomfortable way. Perhaps it will be best for each of us to switch off using the mattress. One night I'll sleep in the succah and the next night you can sleep in the succah". Eli replied, "If we do that then every other night you won't be able to sleep in the succah. Maybe it will be best for you to sleep in the succah by yourself". But Akiva felt that it might be best to switch off to give his son the opportunity to do the mitzvah. So Akiva and his son had three options. Which would be best? Would it be best to sleep in an uncomfortable way without a mattress and both can sleep? Would it be best for them to switch off so each one could be comfortable? Or would it be best for only one to sleep in the succah? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about sleeping in the Succah, Rav Zilberstein wrote that it would be better for the father to sleep alone and not sleep in a way that is uncomfortable.

— Source: Table Talk Edition #201 (Parshas Succos)

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Beis Hillel said to Beis Shammai: 'Did it not happen that the Elders of Beis Shammai and the Elders of Beis Hillel went together to visit Rabbi Yochanan ben HaChoranit, and found him sitting with his head and most of his body inside the Sukkah while his table was inside the house?' Beis Shammai replied: 'From there you bring a proof? Indeed they told him: If that is how you have always conducted yourself, you have never fulfilled the mitzvah of Sukkah in your life!' And in the very next Mishnah: An incident occurred when the daughter-in-law of Shammai the Elder gave birth to a baby boy on Sukkos, and Shammai broke open the ceiling plaster above the bed and placed Sukkah roofing (s'chach) over the bed for the sake of the newborn child!

Mishnah, Sukkah 2:7–8

❖ Rabbi Shimon recounted: An incident occurred involving Tavi, the pious servant of Rabban Gamliel, who used to sleep under the bed inside the Sukkah so that he could listen to the Torah discussions of the sages. Rabban Gamliel said to the Elders: 'Have you seen my servant Tavi? He is a Torah scholar, and he knows that servants are exempt from the obligation of Sukkah—that is why he sleeps under the bed!' From Rabban Gamliel's casual remark, we learn both that one who sleeps under a bed in the Sukkah has not fulfilled his obligation, and that even the everyday conversation of Torah scholars requires study!

Mishnah, Sukkah 2:1

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Uncle Hillel lived with his nephew and niece, Tuli and Suri. They knew that he had endured great hardships in his life, but they never asked for details. Maybe they were a bit afraid of hearing them. They were aware that he had survived the Holocaust, though he had lost his wife and four children. Every so often, he would wake up screaming in the middle of the night. At first, they would stand outside his door and wait, wondering if there was something they could do for him. In due time, however, they learned to accept that there really wasn't much they could do to help him. They discovered that this was the way many survivors lived. Although they had survived the war physically, part of them had died along with their families. Emotionally, they would never be able to fully recover from the horrific pain and suffering they had endured. On occasion, many of the memories they tried so hard to suppress would come back as nightmares, in which they would relive their harrowing experiences. Yet, Uncle Hillel went about his life while his nieces, nephews, and extended family came to love him and respect him for what he was. As the years went by, his health began to deteriorate and he slowed down quite a bit. But Succos, which had always been his favorite holiday, was still very special to him, despite his ill health. His family never knew why this particular holiday was his favorite. Uncle Hillel enjoyed not only eating, but also sleeping in the sukkah; as he got on in years, his family worried that if he slept outside in the cold his health would be adversely affected. But Uncle Hillel overrode their objections and absolutely insisted on sleeping in the sukkah. He was adamant and there was no talking him out of it. And so, his relatives set up the cot for him in the sukkah. At least he wouldn't be alone, for his nephew was going to be spending the night there as well. As they prepared the beds, he spoke emotionally, with burning determination, "I want you to know something. Ever since the war, I have always experienced horrible nightmares about my wife and children being killed. That is why I wake up screaming so often." Tuli was shocked. His uncle had never mentioned the war before. He had never referred to his nightmares. Tuli did not know how to respond. Uncle Hillel looked at him, fire in his eyes, and continued. "But on the nights of Succos, I know that I will sleep well, for I am sleeping be'tzila dimeheimenusa (בְּצִלָּא דְמְהֵימְנוּתָא — in the Shade of Faith). When I sleep inside His Shade, I feel as though I am sleeping in His Arms. They are the best nights of sleep I get all year long." Tuli was in awe of what he had just heard. Uncle Hillel gingerly lay down in the cot that had been provided for him. The wind was blowing and it was cold. But Uncle Hillel was as comfortable as he would ever be. He was in the Arms of the Almighty.

A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rebbetzin Miriam Sofer of Hungary was a great figure in the famous Sofer family. After surviving Auschwitz. She moved to Israel, where her husband, Rabbi Yochanan, started a yeshivah — Yeshivah Ohel Shimon. Having been spared from extermination in the death camp. She had decided that her mission in life was to be compassionate and bring joy to those devoted to God. One of the yeshivah students once came to her home to help decorate the Rosh Yeshivah's large sukkah. The student exerted himself to hang various decorations to fulfill the commandment to beautify a mitzvah and to make it a beautiful sukkah. When he was about finished. Rebbetzin Miriam Sofer walked in to thank him for his efforts. After expressing her appreciation and satisfaction with a flood of compliments, as was her way. She more carefully looked around to see what he had done. She then very tactfully asked. "Would you please move this decoration here, facing the entrance, and put this one next to it, and this other one next to that?" She said she knew it was bothersome, but she still asked, would he please do it. If it wasn't too much trouble? The student was surprised, wondering what the fuss was about, and asked. "What difference does it make if this decoration or the other one is here or there?" "This ornament was made by a certain student." she said. "and that one by another student. Both of them usually visit our sukkah during the holiday. The first thing they'll look for when they come in is their decoration, and if they don't see it immediately in a prominent place opposite the entrance. It will lessen their holiday joy. If their decorations are put in an out-of-the-way place, it might cause them some resentment, and since the sukkah is supposed to be a sukkah of peace, it's only right that it act to increase peace and remove any annoyance."

Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ One person who used to frequent Rav Shach's house had this to say: "If you want to know the meaning of cheshkas haTorah, passion for Torah, if you want to understand the extent to which Torah was the breath of life for him, the following story will testify to that; It was during Sukkos. Rav Shach had fallen sick that year, and he was confined in his house, bedridden, and in that condition I found him when I went to visit him. As soon as he noticed my presence he spoke to me, and began learning with me. We sat there like that, learning nonstop, for a few hours, and I began to feel very hungry. I wanted to eat something to restore my energy, so I stopped learning and got up to go out to the sukkah to eat there, as the halachah requires. Rav Shach saw what I was doing and asked why I had stopped learning. I explained that I was feeling weak with hunger, so I wanted to go out to the sukkah and have something to eat. Rav Shach raised his eyebrows in surprise. 'But it's a Mishnah mefureshes! [an explicit Mishnah],' he said, 'and it's the halachah — sick persons and those who are attending them are exempt from being in the sukkah! Can there be any greater "attendant" to a sick man than the chavrusa who comes to learn with him?' On that basis, he told me to eat in the house, at his bedside, so that we wouldn't have to stop learning."

Path to Greatness, by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 482

❖ R' Binyomin Kamenetsky related the following story. One Sukkos in our town of Tzitevian, our pots, filled with food were stolen from our sukkah. When our father, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, saw what happened and responded as follows: "I know who must have stolen them - and he also needs some holiday joy. And as far as the pots are concerned, I am sure we will get them back." A while later someone - the thief himself - came to our home and said he found some pots on the road. Our father took the pots, saying, "I'll take care of it. I'll return them to whom they belong"

Retold By Rav Nosson Kamenetsky

❖ The first Sukkos after the Chofetz Chaim's second marriage, his new wife asked him to build the sukkah in a different location than he had been doing all along. The Chofetz Chaim did it without a peep. After it was completed, she asked him to move it to its original place. He took it down and moved it again without saying a word. Seeing it back at its original place, she said, "You know what, I think I like it where it was the first time." He took it down and moved it again without comment.

Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, would run to his sukkah on the first night of Succos with the excitement of a young child. One Succos, he was visited by a talmid. When the talmid rose to leave, the Rosh Yeshivah escorted him to the door of the sukkah and stopped. "Please forgive me — I would love to escort you further," he said, "but it would mean too great a loss — each moment that one is in the sukkah he fulfills a mitzvah."

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO BUILD A SUKKAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 17-10

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Should one make a berachah when they build the sukkah?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Rambam ruled that one who constructs a sukkah does not recite a blessing at the time of construction; rather, the blessing is recited when he first enters to dwell in it. It is specifically upon the culminating act of fulfillment — which constitutes the completion of the commandment — that one recites the blessing: '...Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to dwell in the sukkah' (leishev ba-sukkah). For dwelling in the sukkah is explicitly counted among the 613 biblical commandments, whereas building the sukkah serves as an enabling branch (hechsher mitzvah) of the primary obligation.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Yitzchak had a tall palm tree in his yard. Over the years the tall palm tree grew and the branches started to hang over his neighbor, Akiva's yard. Akiva didn't mind. However one year Akiva approached Yitzchak with the following question. "Yitzchak, my wife would like to move the area where we make our sukkah. It is near the fence between our yards and that is actually under the branches of your palm tree. Do you think you can trim the branches over my yard so we can make the sukkah there."? Yitzchak said he would look into it. He called a tree cutting service and got an estimate. Because the tree was very tall, they would have to use a cherry picker. It was going to cost $1000 to have the palm branches cut down. Yitzchak called Akiva back and said "I just got an estimate for the tree trimming service. I'm willing to cut my tree but I would like you to pay the $1000." Akiva resented that. "What do you mean I have to pay the $1000", he argued. "It's your tree that is over my yard. You have to pay for it.". But Yitzchak countered. "The branches were here for a while and you never said anything. All of a sudden you decided to move your sukkah there. If you want that specific spot for your sukkah, you will have to pay for the tree. Why should I pay because you want your sukkah specifically in that exact spot. The two decided to bring this question to a Rav before the resentment started to grow further. What do you think? Who is obligated to pay for the tree trimming? Akiva the one who wants to move his sukkah to that spot in his own yard, or Yitzchak the owner of the tree?

Answer: Regarding the question of the palm tree, Rav Zilberstein answered that the nizak, the one who wants to build the succah, would have to pay for the tree cutting. He has the right to cut it, but he has to pay for it. However it would be midas chasidus, a matter of piety for the tree owner to contribute in the cost of cutting the tree.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 182 (Table Talk Edition #103 (Parshas Toldos))

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In 1827, after the sudden passing of his wife, the renowned Pinsk Torah scholar Rav Yeshaya Bardaki decided to comfort his two grieving young children by moving to Eretz Yisrael to begin life anew in Yerushalayim. Departing shortly after Pesach, they journeyed for months across Europe until they reached the port of Beirut just before Sukkos. Finding a cargo ship loading timber for a wealthy builder in Acco, Rav Yeshaya gave the gruff sailors the last of his money to allow him and his two small children aboard. Soon after setting sail, fierce winds delayed the voyage so that Sukkos arrived while they were still at sea. Remarkably, the sailors generously offered Rav Yeshaya planks from their cargo of lumber so he could erect a kosher sukkah on the ship's deck—a kindness he saw as a clear sign of Hashem's watchful protection. The next day, however, a far deadlier tempest struck as the ship approached the coast of Eretz Yisrael. Towering waves crashed over the deck until, several thousand feet from shore, the vessel split in two! Hurled into the raging sea, Rav Yeshaya clung desperately to his young son and daughter with both arms, but as the violent swells dragged them under and his strength gave out, his grip slipped. Crying out with his last breath, "Please, Hashem, help me!" he lost consciousness. Hours later, Rav Yeshaya awoke washed ashore under the warm sun. Frantically searching the beach, he found his little boy lying motionless

on the sand; as he lifted him, the child coughed up water and opened his eyes! Running farther down the shoreline in tears, he spotted his daughter's still form—and as he cradled her, she too coughed and revived! The children explained the miracle: when the ship broke apart in the waves, they had managed to grab hold of the wooden planks from the sukkah their father had built on deck, floating safely to the shore of Eretz Yisrael on the very boards of the mitzvah. Rav Yeshaya settled in Yerushalayim, where he became one of its foremost rabbanim. Throughout his life, he taught the lesson of that shipwreck: when life's storms overwhelm a person and he feels his own grasp slipping, he need only cry out, "Hashem, please don't let go of me!"—for our Father in Heaven never lets go of His children.

A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The petirah of the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael. Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, in the summer of 1999 was a terrible blow to the Baltimore community. A father figure to many, Rav Weinberg had a dynamic personality that endeared him to his students and so many others. Although life seemed to have stopped that fateful Thursday. Everyday tasks still had to continue. As Mrs. Michal Seidemann was doing her weekly shopping, she noticed a woman with tears streaming down her cheeks putting food in her shopping cart. The woman kept repeating, "Who will I now turn to for advice?" Mrs. Seidemann barely knew this woman but felt compelled to try to comfort her. But her efforts were futile; the woman was inconsolable. "You don't understand," sobbed the woman. "I called the Rosh HaYeshiva with all of my problems, and he was always there to guide me. Let me tell you something extraordinary that he did for my family that will give you an idea why I am so distraught. As you know, I am a single mother of five young children, and money is always tight. When Succos was approaching, I realized that I had no money for a sukkah. I called the Rosh HaYeshiva to ask him if it was necessary for me to build a sukkah, since my children were all under the age of Bar Mitzvah. The Rosh HaYeshiva explained to me that technically I wasn't required to have a sukkah. However, it is wonderful for children to have memories of family meals in their own sukkah. Therefore, it would certainly be marvelous if I could obtain one. "After our conversation, I understood the importance of building a sukkah, yet I had no idea how I would get the money to buy one. I barely had time to think about it when a truck pulled up in front of my home the next day. A young man appeared at my door and asked my name. Within minutes, he began emptying panels of wood from his truck. Tears welled up in my eyes as I watched him assemble the most beautiful sukkah in my backyard. "I found out that immediately after I had spoken with the Rosh HaYeshiva, he had called this fellow who builds succahs and asked him to build one for me at the Rosh HaYeshiva's expense. Although I had never once mentioned to him that I did not have money to pay for a sukkah, he understood my dilemma simply from my question. This is just one example of how the Rosh HaYeshiva looked out for my family. There were so many more." Yes, the Rosh HaYeshiva was absolutely correct. This family was able to create many years of memories in their own succah! And when they sit in their sukkah each year, they remember Rav Weinberg's wisdom, kindness, and concern.

For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ If you were on the poor side, finding boards out of which to build the walls of your sukkah was always a problem. Year after year, therefore, Reb Mordechai of The eve Lechovitch used to prepare a stock of them, and lend of them out to the poor folk of the town during the few Sukkos days between Yom Kippur and the festival of Sukkos. One year, on a Friday, the very eve of Sukkos, a threadbare cobbler, lame in one leg, made his way up to the door of the tzaddik. Could he borrow just a few planks for his sukkah? The tzaddik answered that there were none left. Looking out of his window, he then saw the ragged fellow limping from house to house, still in search of a few boards. He felt so sorry for him that he burst into tears. "Master of the Universe!" he cried. "Just look how Your Children cherish the mitzvah of living in a sukkah! See with what self-sacrifice they are determined to fulfill it! It's raining outside. The alleys are full of mud and mire. Yet there he tramps, that ragged cobbler, lame in one leg, and wearing torn shoes - looking for boards for a sukkah! Look down, then, Master of the Universe, from Your holy dwelling-place in heaven. Bless Your People, Israel and spread out over them Your

Sukkah, Your Tabernacle of Peace." The tzaddik then climbed up to the roof of his house, and searched about until he found a few boards. These he handed to his attendant with the instruction that he should run after the cobbler with them, and since it was the eve of Shabbos, when time would be even shorter than usual, he should help him to build his sukkah as well.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 139

❖ Yitay Shabi shares: I grew up in a home where my parents believed in Hashem, but that's where their religion began and ended. I did not have a very Jewish upbringing. I did get a pair of tefillin in honor of my bar mitzvah, more for the formality of it. I can count on my fingers how many times I've donned them in the 27 years since then. My wife is from a traditional home, and we hadn't done anything very Jewish until our twin daughters turned three. At that point, I decided I wanted my children to have a feeling for Yahudut. And so, occasionally, we would make a seudas Shabbos or perform some other "exciting" mitzvah. This year, we built a succah for the first time. Succot came to an end and Simchat Torah set in. I didn't have major plans, especially since my neighborhood in Beeri didn't even have a minyan of men interested in celebrating. At 6:30 in the morning, we began to hear many sirens. I figured it was some war in Gaza, located not far from us. We went into our shelter, not bothering to lock our front door. Only minutes later, the door was smashed in and the mechablim made their way to our mamad, our shelter room. Being that there was no lock on the door, I held it closed from inside while being mitpallel to Hashem. They tried opening the door without success and finally took out a hammer, which broke off the handle. Now the door was jammed and so the terrorists lit a tire and stuck it into the air holes in the doorway. Soon the shelter room filled with thick smoke. "We have no choice; we have to leave. Maybe they'll have pity on us because we have young children, I told my wife. B'hashgachah, the door was jammed from the inside as well, and we could not get out. I ran to the window and opened it. Strangely, at that moment, I didn't see any Arabs; we each took one of our daughters and jumped out. We camouflaged ourselves with the leftover branches from the sechach that we'd cut. I felt like a two-year-old who covers his eyes and thinks that no one can see him... But Hashem was watching us and protecting us. Hundreds of Arabs passed by but none of them saw us. We lay there until 5:00 PM when we began to feel the heat of the fire burning in our house, and we ran to a small nearby forest. We were shot at on the way, but not one bullet hit us. After many nissim, we arrived at my brother's house in Rechovot the next morning. Several days later, I went back to my hometown to see if anything was salvageable. My house and everything in it was destroyed. My car was wrecked. The house we were in the middle of building was razed. There was, however, one thing still standing: my succah, with all of its decorations, table, and chairs and the pile of extra sechach in which we had lain for six hours. We saw so clearly that Hashem alone orchestrated every detail of this war. Oh, and as for my tefillin, in these last few months I've worn them many more times than in the previous 27 years.

Chayeinu Magazine (Table Talk, Edition 427, Parshas Beshalach, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner)

B. TO EAT A KEZAYIS OF BREAD IN THE SUKKAH ON THE FIRST NIGHT

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is an active positive commandment to eat at least an olive's volume (kezayis) of bread in the sukkah on the first night of Succos. This halachah is derived through a textual analogy (gezeirah shavah) from the obligation to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach. Any law derived through one of the thirteen classical principles of Torah exposition transmitted at Sinai carries the full status of an authentic biblical commandment (de'Oraisa).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ On the first day of Sukkos, a person cannot fulfill his obligation with his fellow's Lulav unless his fellow gives it to him as a complete gift. An incident occurred when Rabban Gamliel and the Elders—Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, and Rabbi Akiva—were traveling aboard a ship and had no Lulav with them, except that Rabban Gamliel had purchased a single Lulav for a thousand zuz! Once Rabban Gamliel took it and fulfilled his obligation, he gave it as a gift to his colleague, who took it and fulfilled his obligation and then gave it as a gift to the next colleague, until all four had fulfilled the mitzvah and returned the Lulav to Rabban Gamliel.

Tosefta, Sukkah 2:13 (and Talmud Bavli, Sukkah 41b)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In the middle of Yom Kippur, the Feldafing DP camp residents were visited by the supreme Allied commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who later became president of the United States. The camp residents all gathered to greet him at the entrance to the camp. The Klausenberger Rebbe came to welcome the general with a gift of a braided challah and salt, the customary gift for a gentile ruler, in one hand and a Torah scroll in the other. In honor of General Eisenhower's visit, a royal welcoming ceremony had been organized. The majority of the survivors wanted the Rebbe to be the main speaker, feeling that he could best express the survivors' feelings and needs. When the Klausenberger Rebbe reached the platform, in front of eight thousand people, he unfurled the tallis in the air, recited the blessing LeHisateif BeTzitzis, and wrapped the tallis around himself in full view of the entire crowd. The Rebbe's actions made an enormous emotional impact on the crowd. Seeing the Rebbe adorned in a tallis reminded all the survivors of their beloved parents and other loved ones who had been murdered in the sanctification of God's name. No one dared to utter a sound. As total silence reigned, the Rebbe began to speak. In a thundering voice, he spoke of the destruction and the suffering, the lot of the Jewish people and their role in the world as the Chosen. People, the nation of Hashem. Although he began his speech by blessing General Eisenhower, the honored guest, who had been chosen by heaven to perform the great kindness of liberating an innocent people taken to slaughter, his words were directed primarily to the survivors, challenging them never to forget their heritage. Next he demanded of the "enlightened" and "cultured" countries of the world never to forget what the Nazis had done to the Jewish people. He spoke with an extraordinary strength, and his emotions heightened moment by moment. The crowd of some eight thousand survivors was swept along with him. Tears streamed down every face; grown men wept like babies. When the Rebbe finished speaking, he instructed the chazzan, Aharon Miller, to recite Keil Malei Rachamim for the merit of the holy martyrs. As the words were recited, the crowd wept bitterly. The welcoming ceremony had become, an extraordinary sanctification of God's name. The atmosphere of the crowd changed completely. Lieutenant Meyer Birnbaum translated every word of the Rebbe's speech for General Eisenhower, who was visibly affected by the speech and promised to do everything in his power to help the survivors. A special relationship of mutual respect developed between the Rebbe and General Eisenhower 'a relationship which lasted many years and was utilized several times for the benefit of the religious community. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the general asked the Rebbe, "In what way can I help you now?" The Rebbe answered through the translator that he had but one request. Could the General arrange for the Rebbe and the rest of the survivors to have a set of the four species for the holiday of Sukkos? Upon hearing this request, General Eisenhower was deeply moved. He realized that the survivor standing before him was a man of God. There was no other way to explain why a survivor in a DP camp, when asked personally by the supreme Allied commander for anything that he wished, would ask only for a set of the four species. A special military plane was sent to Italy on General Eisenhower's command to pick up lulavim and esrogim, which were brought back to the Feldafing DP camp for the Rebbe and his followers.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press

❖ After the German capture of Warsaw in 1939, it was still dark when The Brisker Rav woke up to the sound of a great crowd outside. He crept over to his door to see what was going on, and he discovered a long line of people stretching from his doorway into the distance. He looked at his roommate questioningly. The man explained that due to the terrible damage that had been done to the streets and the railway lines, there were only four sets of arba minim in all of Warsaw. The hundreds of thousands of Jews in Warsaw at the time — the residents as well as the mass of refugees who were there would somehow have to manage to fulfill the mitzvah with those few esrogim and lullavim. "Of course," he said, "when I heard that the Rav had an esrog, I spread the word, and soon everyone in the city knew. This explains the long line that began to form in front of your door already in the middle of the night, in spite of the curfew the Germans imposed. Everyone wants the zechus of fulfilling the mitzvah of the day." The roommate had but one request: Although by all rights everyone should wait his turn, and it was not proper to give anyone preferential treatment, he begged that the arba minim be given first to a certain old man from a distant suburb of the city. If he were forced to wait for his turn, he would have to stay there until the afternoon. "Could the rav possibly do him a favor? Then he could get back to his home for the beginning of the second day of Yam Tov — in time to bury one of the members of his family who passed away in the night." Of course The Brisker Rav agreed to his request, adding that because of the great sacrifice these Jews were making — thus expressing their deep desire to do the mitzvah — it is only right that they fulfill the mitzvah before he himself does. Suddenly, just before dawn, out of nowhere, the sounds of trucks rolling in and horns honking broke the stillness. The trucks were full of German soldiers coming to break up the illegal gathering. They lashed out right and left, striking the Jews viciously with the butts of their rifles. The Jews scattered in all directions, and many suffered painful injuries and lay moaning and bleeding in the street. Having finished the job, the soldiers piled into the trucks and sped off. No more than a few minutes passed before the crowd of tenacious Jews had reassembled in their places, waiting in silence for the sunrise and their chance to fulfill the mitzvah of the day. The sun came up and the people began, taking the arba minim one after the other. The Germans returned, though, again and again to disperse the crowd, and the ones at the end of the line did not manage to perform the mitzvah before sunset. They did not despair and came back the next day to try their luck again; perhaps they would merit the mitzvah on the second day of Yam Tov. Among the many who came to make a berachah over the arba minim, The Brisker Rav noticed one man who, when he took the minim in his hands, made a heartfelt berachah, and his joy in doing the mitzvah was extraordinary. The Brisker Rav asked for an explanation, and, in response, the man recounted that all his family had been killed in the bombings over the last month. His last child left alive had been killed by an exploding shell a few hours before the beginning of the chug! The Brisker Rav would later describe the length of the line of people, comparing it to the distance from his Jerusalem home on Press Street to the Zichron Moshe shul. "It was then that you saw," he added emotionally, "what a Jew is!"

The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 376

❖ The Steipler went into a store to buy a lulav. There were many stores to go to and the seller was very excited that the Steipler came to him. The Steipler looked at one lulav, then quickly dismissed it, then went to a bunch more. After looking through all of the available lulavim, he returned to the very first one, paid for it, and left. When his talmidim asked why he had purchased the first one he had put down, the Steipler explained: "In truth, there are many shops I could visit, and I probably could have gone to another store to get a nicer esrog. But if word got out that I went through all the available ones and didn't buy anything, people would say that the Steipler could not find a kosher lulav in the whole store. This would cause him to lose many customers, and that price is too much to pay for a lulav.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 209

❖ One year in Radin there was a shortage of esrogim. They were only able to buy one esrog for the whole town. On succos, the Chofetz Chaim stood in line like everyone else, waiting his turn. He refused to be given any extra privileges. Then there was the question of who would hold it for Hallel. They offered it to the Chofetz Chaim. He said holding it during Hallel is

only a custom. If I am the only one who will hold it, it may cause someone pain. I have no right to perform a custom at the expense of another Jew. The esrog symbolized a beautiful heart. The Chofetz Chaim's heart was a great model for what it represented.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 183

❖ One year, before Sukkos, the chassan of one of the Steipler Gaon's (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky's) granddaughters brought him a selection of six splendid haddassim. They had been sent to him by a relative from Tzefas who had asked that the Steipler pick out three for himself, and the bachur would take the remaining three. When he heard the proposal, the Steipler refused. "You should take first pick," he said. "After all, you're the one who brought them. You had all the trouble, so why should I take first?" The bachur tried to get the Steipler to take the three better ones since, after all, that had been the intention of the relative who sent them. When he saw that his words weren't having any effect, he made a gesture as if to say that he already had hadassim for himself and really all six of them were intended for the Steipler. This seemed to resolve the Steipler's reservations and he sat down to pick out the haddassim he liked best. After long and intense concentration, he finally decided on three of the six. He bound these with his lulav, leaving the other three on a cabinet near the door. " Afterwards, the bachur went to take those three from the cabinet, since they had actually been intended for him all along. When the Steipler realized what had happened and jumped up from his seat. "So you really don't have haddassim for yourself after all! Please do me a kindness and take the better ones for yourself." The bachur tried to explain that he had never in his life had haddassim even as good as the second three, but the Steipler wouldn't listen. "It wouldn't be a yam tov for me. Please do me a favor and take the better ones."

The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 190

❖ One year, two esrogim were sent from Morocco to someone close to The Brisker Rav. The person was told to choose the better one for himself and give the other to the Brisker Rav. The acquaintance didn't dare take the more beautiful esrog for himself, but rather showed both to The Brisker Rav so that he would choose the more mehudar one for himself. What exactly, The Brisker Rav asked him, did the one who sent the esrogim write? He told him what the letter had said, but added that his wish was that The Brisker Rav would choose the better esrog of the two. "You have no permission to pass up the mitzvah," The Brisker Rav told him. "You are commanded just as I am." He insisted that the man choose the more mehudar esrog and leave the other for him. That is to say: the mitzvos are not one's personal properly. One does not have the right to choose among them or to use them as favors to graciously pass on to others.

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 424

❖ Reb Yitzchak of Neshchiz recounted that his father, Reb Mordechai of Neshchiz, was a merchant before he accepted a rabbinical post, and every time he returned home from a business trip he would set aside a modest portion of his profits toward the price of an esrog when the time came. Once, when he had patiently saved six silver rubles in this way, he set out for Brody to buy an esrog, for at that time he lived in those parts. On the way he was surprised to hear the sighs and sobs of a water-carrier. It transpired that the poor fellow's livelihood had just been cut off: his old horse had just died, and his wagon was useless without it. The tzaddik left him for a few moments, and with his six silver rubles bought him a new horse. After having handed it over he said to himself: "So what's the difference? Buying an esrog is a mitzvah commanded by the Almighty, and so is this a mitzvah commanded by the Almighty." In fact he found his situation amusing, and joked to himself: "Everyone will pronounce their blessing over an esrog; I'll pronounce my blessing over a horse... " As it happened, though, someone later brought him a fine esrog in time for the festival, so that in fact he made his berachah not only over the horse, but over an esrog as well.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 154

❖ A man had no money to buy an esrog for Sukkos. His wife had an exceptional pair of tefillin which she had inherited from her father and had given him in her dowry. Since the husband owned another pair of tefillin he decided to sell those tefillin to buy himself an esrog with the proceeds. At the end of the day, he returned home beaming with joy, with an excellent and expensive esrog in his hands. His wife couldn't believe her eyes. "Where on earth did you get money to buy such a beautiful esrog?" she asked. "I sold your father's tefillin — they were not being used anyway." The wife exploded in anger. "You fool You dared sell my father's tefillin?" She lunged at her husband and knocked the esrog out of his hands. It fell to the ground and a piece broke off, making it pasul (unfit for use) — and worthless. The man calmly bent over, picked up the esrog, held it in his hand to appraise the damage — but didn't say a word. And then, after a few moments, he suddenly began singing and dancing. His wife looked at him in amazement. "Are you out of your mind?" She asked. Not at all, he said, obviously very happy. "i lost my precious tefillin; I lost my perfect esrog. But I was able to control myself and I did not lose my Shalom Bayis. Could anything be more of a reason for joy?"

The River, The Kettle, and The Bird, by Rabbi Aharon Feldman

❖ Despite his humility, the Steipler knew that his actions were carefully noted by others and he kept this in mind at all times. Before Succos one year, he went to a certain store seeking a lulav which met his exacting standards. However, he could not find one to his liking and he left the store empty-handed. After taking a few steps down the street, he suddenly turned around, reentered the store and soon emerged with a lulav. He later explained, "In truth, I did not find any lulavim to my liking. But after leaving the store it dawned on me that if people would see me leaving the store empty-handed, they might say, 'R' Kanievsky was in that store and could not find a single kosher lulav!' This would cause unwarranted loss of business, not to mention distress, to the proprietor. That is why I bought one which is kosher, though I do not plan to use it."

5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

26. To Take the Four Species (Arba'ah Minim)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 36 Sefer Chareidim 17-11

As the Torah says, And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick leaved trees, and willows of the brook (Vayikra 23:40, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is meant by "fruit of a splendid tree"?
- What is meant by "branches of palm trees"?
- What is meant by "boughs of thick leaved trees"? How many of these are needed?
- What is meant by "willows of the brook"? How many of these are needed?
- How should they be held?
- If a person didn't shake them, but just picked them up, has he fulfilled his mitzvah? Would a person be able to make a berachah on them if he picked them up but didn't yet shake it?
- What time of the day can they be shaken? What if they weren't shaken in the morning, can they be shaken at night?
- How many days do we shake the lulav and esrog?
- Do we shake it on Shabbos?

- Why not?
- If one has three species but an esrog that is passul because its pitim was knocked off, can he at least fulfill the mitzvah of the three?
- Do you have to own your own, or can you borrow it? Would it make a difference if it is the first day, or the second days?
- If one accidentally used his friend's esrog the whole succos without his permission, has he fulfilled the mitzvah?
- Should a child shake them?
- Are women obligated to shake the lulav and esrog?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This biblical precept requires taking the Four Species (arba'ah minim): one lulav (date palm branch), one esrog (citron), three hadassim (myrtle boughs), and two aravos (willow branches).

One must hold and take them up in the natural direction of their growth (derech gedeilasan), with their cut stems positioned downward and their tops pointing upward.

Once a person has lifted them together, he has fulfilled the essential biblical obligation.

The entire day, from sunrise until the emergence of the stars, is a valid time for taking them up.

Under biblical law, the obligation to take the Four Species everywhere outside the Beis HaMikdash applied solely on the first day of the festival; however, by rabbinic decree instituted after the Temple's destruction, they are taken throughout all seven days of Succos in commemoration of the Sanctuary (zecher la-Mikdash).

The Four Species are not taken when the festival coincides with Shabbos; Chazal prohibited taking them on Shabbos — even when the first day falls on Shabbos — out of concern that someone might inadvertently carry them four cubits through the public domain (reshus ha-rabbim).

The Four Species are mutually indispensable (me'akvin zeh es zeh); if even one of the species is missing or halachically disqualified, none of them are acceptable and the mitzvah is not fulfilled.

If the species are borrowed, they are invalid on the first day of Yom Tov — since Scripture mandates personal ownership ('and you shall take for yourselves on the first day') — but they are fully acceptable on the remaining days of the festival.

If the species were acquired through theft, they are permanently disqualified on all days of the festival as a mitzvah facilitated through a transgression (mitzvah ha-ba'ah ba-aveirah).

A young child who knows how to wave the Four Species properly is obligated to take them by rabbinic enactment, in order to train him in the performance of mitzvos (chinuch).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Succos is during the harvest season. We wave the lulav and esrog in all directions and symbolically pledge to unitedly use our resources (received by the harvest) and our lives to serve Hashem. This commitment inspires us to devote our resources and our lives to a pursuit of perfecting our character through the mitzvos and so come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

GEMARA TANIS 2B

We wave these species because they need rain more than others do, and it is a means of praying for rain.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM

We shake species that need a lot of rain (arava), that taste good (lulav), that smell good (hadasim), and that look good (esrog). We are appreciative of that fact that we have the luxury all four of those aspects now, as opposed to our experience in the desert when we didn't have extra water, good tastes, smell, and sights.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 324)

When we wave these fruits we symbolically dedicate the fruit and joy of our harvest to Hashem.

These four species also all represent different parts of our bodies (eyes, lips, spine, & heart), and shaking it symbolizes dedicating our body to serve Hashem.

RABBEINU BACHYA

The four species symbolize the three Patriarchs, Avraham Yitzchak and Yackov as well as Yosef.

The Esrog symbolizes Avraham because it is beautiful and Avraham's old age was beautiful and fruitful.

Yitzchak is symbolized by the lulav—kapos tamarim because kapos means tied which is a reference to Yitzchak's akeida, binding.

Yaakov is compared to the hadasim which are thick with many leaves and Yackov was blessed with many offspring.

Yosef is symbolized by the aravos, because the aravos dry up quickly and Yosef similarly died before the rest of his brothers. We bring all of these together to access the merits of these Avos.

The four species also symbolize all of the four great kingdoms of Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome. We express with these four species that just as we have survived these great powers with the help of Hashem, so will we survive the others.

These four species maintain freshness and moisture all year long. We use the four species and daven, sing and dance with them to symbolize that the Torah should similarly be fresh, dynamic, and vibrant with us all year long.

The esrog and lulav bear fruit. They symbolize the fruit of the world to come, and the fruits of this world. The hadasim are bitter and the aravos droop. All together, these four symbolize that if we want to be able to enjoy the fruit of this world and the next, we have to be humble like the aravos, and occasionally bear bitterness.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

Great ohr is brought forth by the succa. Through the means of the lulav and esrog, that ohr causes the nation and the anti-Semites to be afraid of us. This only works in potential for the future. In the future the ohr will be revealed and they will be afraid of us.

The shaking of the lulav and the hakafos have the effects of making them subordinate themselves to Yisrael until they chose to willingly be Yisrael's avadim. They do that in order to get through Yisrael the light of Hashem that they see, which was received from the ananei hakavod. After they serve Yisrael, Yisrael will bring them to serve Hashem.

SFAS EMES

• The arba minim also bear witness to the victory of Klal Yisrael in judgment. The Sfas Emes explains the connection drawn by Chazal between taking the species and taking the bundle of hyssop in Mitzrayim. The hyssop expressed the lowly condition of those first redeemed through Hashem's kindness. Hashem then elevated them through Torah and mitzvos, enabling them to become worthy through their own avodah of the level first given freely. He therefore reads the taking on Sukkos as "in your merit" (bi-zechuschem). The Sfas Emes explains elsewhere that the festival's joy can therefore arise from the judgment itself: through it, the attachment of Klal Yisrael to Hashem has been clarified (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5660).

• The first purpose of taking the species is to answer Hashem's kindness with our own avodah. The Sfas Emes explains that the sukkah expresses Hashem's initiative: He draws Klal Yisrael near and protects them as His children. Klal Yisrael, in turn, wishes to cleave to Him through good deeds, so that this closeness should have a contribution from their side. He therefore reads "And you shall take for yourselves" (u-lekachtem lachem) as "from your side" (mi-tzidchem). The arba minim provide that help through the different paths of Torah and mitzvos represented by the species. Our response is required, and the means of making that response is itself among Hashem's gifts (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5649).

• There is a further responsibility within this shared avodah. Chazal teach that someone who merits may receive his own portion and another's portion in Gan Eden. The Sfas Emes applies this to the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and says that a tzaddik who receives the spiritual portion of another must seek to return it to him. He brings Moshe Rabbeinu as the example: Moshe received the crowns of Klal Yisrael and returns them on Shabbos. The tzaddik's greater acquisition should become a means through which others regain what belongs to them. This gives the agudah a precise purpose beyond standing together: the members of Klal Yisrael help restore one another's place in their common spiritual life (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5663).

• The renewed life allows a person's true spiritual form to become visible again. The Sfas Emes describes sin as concealing "the spiritual form of Man" (tziyur ha-adam)—the form of the person as Hashem created him to serve His purpose. After purification, the arba minim help reveal that form and bring a Jew to know "how Your Name is called upon me." This is knowledge of the Divine image within the person, the spiritual dignity and responsibility given by Hashem. The people whose inner form has become revealed can give expression to the praise for which they were created, with the freedom gained through release from the yetzer hara (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5655).

• A person must also recognize the particular spiritual life that he is being given. The Sfas Emes reads "And you shall take for yourselves" (u-lekachtem lachem) as a call for each Jew to take hold of his own self and find his place in avodas Hashem. He quotes the Chiddushei HaRim's teaching that, after Yom Kippur, the inner point mixed during the year with worldly distractions becomes clarified again. This belongs to the meaning of the

Festival of Ingathering (Chag HaAsif). Each species represents a different place within Klal Yisrael, and each person can receive the daas suited to his place. He finds that place through belonging to the whole and seeking the fulfillment of Hashem's will for Klal Yisrael (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5644).

SFAS EMES — ARAVAS HOSHANA RABBAH

• A person must also recognize the particular spiritual life that he is being given. The Sfas Emes reads "And you shall take for yourselves" (u-lekachtem lachem) as a call for each Jew to take hold of his own self and find his place in avodas Hashem. He quotes the Chiddushei HaRim's teaching that, after Yom Kippur, the inner point mixed during the year with worldly distractions becomes clarified again. This belongs to the meaning of the Festival of Ingathering (Chag HaAsif). Each species represents a different place within Klal Yisrael, and each person can receive the daas suited to his place. He finds that place through belonging to the whole and seeking the fulfillment of Hashem's will for Klal Yisrael (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5644).

• The inward life of the individual is received within the life of Klal Yisrael. The Midrash describes the species through taste and fragrance: the esrog has both, the lulav has taste, the hadas has fragrance, and the aravah has neither. These represent Jews with Torah and mitzvos, with one of these strengths, or with neither. The Sfas Emes states the purpose of their gathering directly: "to bind and unite the souls of Klal Yisrael together." Sin can create separation in both relationships. After teshuvah, gathering the species gives expression to the restored unity through which the people can enter Hashem's shelter together (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5663).

• The four kinds are also found within each person. The Sfas Emes explains that one middah or faculty may be more corrected than another; a person has strengths alongside parts of himself that still need work. How can the corrected powers help the others? He answers through giving them to Klal Yisrael. When a person places his good deeds and daas at the service of the whole, his avodah takes on the character of a communal offering. The purpose of the avodah is that Hashem should have satisfaction from Klal Yisrael as a whole. The person's own repair follows through this dedication, including the humble bodily side that must learn to follow the neshamah (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5651).

• The inward reception brings joy, as the Torah itself joins "And you shall take" (u-lekachtem) with "And you shall rejoice" (u-semachtem). The Sfas Emes explains that the principal joy comes from the revelation of the neshamah, and that the arba minim attach Klal Yisrael to the renewed life of the soul. After the awe of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a person may find it difficult to awaken joy through his own powers; Hashem gives him a way to receive it. The verse "fullness of joys in Your presence" (sova semachos) describes receiving the inward content of the joy until the heart is satisfied by it. He states the purpose plainly: something of the joy should remain throughout the year. The festival offers a joy whose source is renewed attachment, and the mitzvah helps that attachment take root in the heart (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5665).

• Receiving inwardly also means discerning what is most precious in the gift. The Sfas Emes describes a guest admitted into the king's garden. The trees and fragrances offer much to enjoy, but a person with understanding gives his heart to the king who has invited him. This is the meaning he finds in the letters of palm branch (lulav), read as a heart directed to Him. The guest rejoices in being with the king. In another maamar, he describes Klal Yisrael's inward reception through the image of the heart receiving refined nourishment. Their desire is for daas and wisdom, like Shlomo HaMelech's request for a listening heart (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5637).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

An esrog that was kosher was mixed with one that was orlah, which is assur behana. He only has these. If he shakes one individually he would not be able to make a brachah. If a kosher esrog is indistinguishably mixed with an esrog of Orlah, may he take both together to fulfill the mitzvah, or does the doubt invalidate the blessing?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein cites the dispute between the Kehillas Yaakov (Maharit Algazi, Os 60) and Bikurei Yaakov (end of Siman 649) — who rule that since each esrog is forbidden in benefit out of doubt (safek orlah), neither fulfills the requirement of 'lachem' (fit for your use) — versus the Ben Ish Chai in Responsa Rav Pe'alim (Vol. 1, Siman 35), who proves from Yevamos (41b) that by taking both esrogim one after the other without a brachah, one fulfills the mitzvah out of doubt (mi-ma nafshach).

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yevamos, p. 326

Avi operated an Arba'ah Minim shop. An unmarked, choice Esrog lay on the counter. A customer, Donny, entered and asserted that he had purchased and paid for this specific Esrog earlier in the day but had temporarily left it behind. Avi has no recollection of Donny purchasing it. Meanwhile, another customer, Berel, wishes to purchase the Esrog on the spot. If Berel buys it, is the ownership doubtful (safek), preventing Berel from reciting a blessing on Sukkos due to the biblical requirement of "lachem" (uncontested personal ownership)?

Answer: Analyzing the case where a customer (Donny) claims he already purchased a specific esrog in the shop while the merchant in possession (Avi) denies the claim and sells it to a third party (Berel), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein cites Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 222:8) and Sha'ar HaMelech (Hilchos Lulav 8:1) and rules that since the merchant has physical possession (muchzak) and Torah law awards the item to the party in possession against an unsubstantiated claim, the merchant retains full halachic ownership and can validly transfer complete ownership (lachem) to Berel so that Berel fulfills the mitzvah and may recite the brachah on Sukkos.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 84

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Brisker Rav once recounted a remarkable story from his years as Rav of Brisk: A member of the community repeatedly came to him distressed that his elderly mother lived alone in the distant town of Shawel (Shavli). Because he had to support his family in Brisk, he could rarely travel there to care for her, yet she stubbornly refused his pleas to move into his home. "If the Rav commands her to move here so I can fulfill kibbud eim properly," the son urged, "she will surely listen." When the elderly woman next visited Brisk, her son brought her to the Rav. The Brisker Rav explained what a great merit it would be to allow her devoted son to care for her and fulfill the mitzvah of honoring his mother. "Rebbe," the woman replied firmly, "ask anything of me, but I can never leave Shawel. Let me tell you a story, and you will understand why." "My grandfather, z"l, was a penniless man who barely scraped together a livelihood, yet his heart burned with one lifelong dream: to merit at least once in his life to recite the brachah on Sukkos over an esrog that belonged entirely to him, rather than merely using the communal town esrog. For decades, whenever he could spare a tiny copper coin, he dropped it into a special sack. When he was old and gray, he and my grandmother traveled joyfully to Vilna before Sukkos and placed the heavy sack before an esrog merchant. After counting the thousands of small coins, however, the dealer regretfully informed them that the sum still fell short of even the cheapest kosher esrog. "Heartbroken, my grandparents walked the streets of Vilna in silence until my grandmother said: 'We are old now and no longer need a whole house. Let us sell our home in Shawel, rent a single room for our remaining years, and use the proceeds to buy the finest esrog!' They sold their house immediately and handed the large sum to the amazed Vilna merchant, who imported for them a magnificent esrog whose

beauty was unmatched in the entire region. "When they returned to their rented room in Shawel, townspeople flocked to behold the wondrous esrog. While my grandfather sat in his room learning Gemara, my grandmother proudly showed the esrog in the kitchen. As it passed from hand to hand, someone accidentally dropped it—and the pitam broke off, rendering the esrog pasul! My grandmother fainted from anguish. When she revived, terrified that the shock might endanger her elderly husband's life, she entered his room and tried to break the news gently in a roundabout way. Seeing her distress, my grandfather cried, 'Has a tragedy befallen one of our children, Heaven forbid?' When she finally told him that the pitam had broken off the esrog for which they had sold their home, he calmly replied: 'Well, the halachah is clear—when one has none, one is exempt!' "Now you understand, Rebbe," the elderly woman concluded with tears in her eyes, "why I can never leave Shawel. Every single day, when I walk past the house that my grandparents sold out of pure love for a mitzvah—and accepted losing without a trace of anger—it fills my soul with such joy and vitality that it gives me life!" "Of course," concluded the Brisker Rav, "after hearing that, I could never tell her to leave Shawel."

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 419

❖ One night, about a week before Pesach, Rav Chaim Kanievsky could not find the lulav he had used on Succos. The custom is to burn the lulav with the chametz, since it had been used for a mitzvah. He searched extensively, as he had seen the lulav earlier that day, but could not find it anywhere. Finally, R' Chaim and the Rebbetzin went to bed. At about 2 a.m. the Rebbetzin noticed that R' Chaim was not in his bed. Alarmed, she began looking for him and, not finding him indoors, she went outside. There she saw R' Chaim inside the large dumpster in front of their house, sifting through the trash. "I think maybe one of the visitors mistakenly threw the lulav into the garbage," he told the Rebbetzin, who promptly climbed into the overflowing receptacle and joined him in picking through the rubbish, to no avail. The next morning, one of their sons arrived before netz. It turned out that he had previously put the lulav in the upstairs apartment for safekeeping. He knew how meaningful it was for his father to adhere to minhagim and did not want the lulav to be misplaced. He never imagined that his well-meaning action would cause his father and mother to spend part of their night in a dumpster!

From Rav Chaim, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Elul and the Yamim Nora'im were past, and Sukkos was approaching. The streets were bustling with activity. People were selling and buying the arba'ah minim. The banging of hammers could be heard everywhere as sukkah walls went up. One person was loading sechach, another was dragging boards. Everyone was preoccupied with the mitzvos of the day. This time period was especially dear to Rav Baruch Dov Povarsky. One would say that the mitzvah of arba'ah minim is a mitzvah bein adam laMakom, one that pertains to a person's relationship with Hashem. But for the Rosh Yeshivah, it was also a mitzvah bein adam lachaveiro. How could that be? Rav Baruch Dov would go looking for a nice lulav. The seller noticed the prominent figure of the Rosh Yeshivah from a distance and dropped what he was doing to greet him. Rav Baruch Dov would examine the lulavim, praise one of them, and buy it. The seller would take the money with a happy sigh. The Rosh Yeshivah bought a lulav from me! Indeed, the Rosh Yeshivah had bought a lulav from him, but he had not yet found a lulav he liked. He entered another store, and the story repeated itself. The seller was excited and displayed his best lulavim for the Rosh Yeshivah. The Rosh Yeshivah did not want to disappoint the seller, so he paid for another lulav. The story repeated itself over and over. In the end, the Rosh Yeshivah arrived home with an armful of lulavim. One year before Sukkos, someone close to Rav Baruch Dov commented, "Why does the Rosh Yeshivah buy so many lulavim? You're surely not going to use all of them." "Of course I use them," Rav Baruch Dov protested. "I use them for something wonderful. I make the seller happy." The same thing happened when Rav Baruch Dov sought to buy an esrog. Orchard owners and talmidim would knock on his door to have the zechus of bringing him the most beautiful esrog. An array of stunning esrogim would pile up on his table, and Rav Baruch Dov insisted on paying for each one. The perfumed fragrance of the esrogim mixed with the scent of his incredible love for every person, a love so overflowing that he was willing to spend immense amounts of money simply to bring others joy.

From At His Table, Published by Tfutza Publications

SHEMINI ATZERES & SIMCHAS TORAH: REJOICING IN THE TORAH

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section relate to observing Shemini Atzeres, a holiday that is the culmination of the High Holidays, as well as the culmination of all of the Shalosh Regalim. This holiday asks us to absorb the totality of all of the lessons of the previous holidays, and fills us with a sanctifying influence that helps us devote ourselves to Hashem and to his Torah.

27. To Rest on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 37

As the Torah says On the eighth day there shall be a holy convocation (Vayikra 23:36, Parshas Emor).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic laws governing Shemini Atzeres are identical to those of the first day of Pesach regarding the cessation of prohibited labor and the permission of food preparation (see Positive Commandment §25)

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Atzeres means gathering. Shemini Atzeres is the very pinnacle of the large cycle of the Regalim, the pilgrimages, and the smaller cycle of the Yamim Noraim, the High Holidays. This is a day to "gather in" all of the inspirational messages of the last three Regalim, as well as the reconciliatory messages of all of the Yamim Noraim. When we absorb all of those ideas together, it is manifest in an explosion of joy in being close to Hashem, a joy in us having the Torah, and a joy of being Jewish. The confluence of the powerful messages of all of the Yamim Tovim all serve to inspire us to keep the Torah in order to perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• Perhaps the single most important Sfas Emes formulation of Shemini Atzeres is: What was accomplished previously through the sukkah and lulav is accomplished on Shemini Atzeres within the very essence of Bnei Yisrael. During Sukkos, holiness comes through external mitzvah structures. The sukkah physically surrounds the person. The lulav is held in the hands. The Jew enters, takes, shakes, sits, and eats within objects that embody spiritual ideas. On Shemini Atzeres those objects are no longer needed. This does not mean they have become unimportant. Their work has succeeded. The external mitzvah has prepared something that can now become inner spiritual essence (penimiyus). Shemini Atzeres asks whether those realities can survive after the sukkah is gone. The answer of the day is yes (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5655).

• The Sfas Emes begins one of his earliest Simchas Torah teachings with a definition both simple and profound: Simchas Torah means rejoicing in the fact that we receive the words of Hashem. The Sfas Emes points in another direction. Torah begins by allowing oneself to be taught. He says that Israel rejoices through setting aside the absolutism of its own knowledge in order to receive the Divine word. This is not anti-intellectual. The Sfas Emes is himself a profoundly intellectual Torah thinker. The point is that Torah cannot be reduced to the mind confirming what it already believes. Learning means encountering truth that can correct the learner. Simchas Torah therefore celebrates the privilege of having a Teacher whose wisdom is greater than ours (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5632).

• The Sfas Emes explains the word Atzeres (sacred assembly and retention) itself as the spiritual task of the day: the purpose of Shemini Atzeres is that the experience should become absorbed into the depth of the heart. This is the central danger of every spiritual experience. Inspiration can be intense and still be temporary. A person may feel transformed during Yom Kippur, elevated in the sukkah, inspired by Torah, or moved by tefillah—yet weeks later little may remain. Shemini Atzeres addresses this problem directly. Do not seek another experience. Hold the existing one. The month of Tishrei has already provided enormous spiritual content. The Sfas Emes therefore makes Shemini Atzeres less about acquiring something new and more about allowing what has already been given to penetrate deeply enough that it will not immediately disappear. The festival is the spiritual art of retention (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5647).

• The Sfas Emes gives a powerful summary: The purpose of all redemption and purification is to become ready for Torah. This gives the entire month a destination. Rosh Hashanah is not an isolated Day of Judgment. Yom Kippur is not only a day for having sins erased. Sukkos is not only celebration after the difficult days have passed. Everything is moving toward the ability to receive Torah again. There is a striking parallel with the spring festivals. Pesach liberates Israel from Egypt so that the nation can reach Shavuos. Freedom is preparation for Torah. Purification without Torah would create an empty vessel. Simchas Torah fills it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5658).

• Sukkos contains physical blessing: harvest, rain, livelihood, and blessing for the nations. Simchas Torah shifts attention from these external forms of life to their inner spiritual essence (penimiyus). The Sfas Emes writes: The primary joy of Israel is in Torah because Torah contains all life. Physical water keeps the body alive. Torah is living waters (mayim chayim) at the level of the soul. Material abundance is one expression of Divine blessing; Torah is the wisdom and life from which blessing receives meaning. But its deepest joy is supposed to remain attached to the Source. The Sfas Emes wants the Jew to learn to love not only what comes from Hashem but what connects him to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5639).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It is an accepted custom that after picking up a sefer which has fallen to the floor; one honors it with a kiss. Rav Pam would point out that there is an even better custom, to learn from the sefer for a minute or two. For a moment of study is to take the sefer's sacred words and make them a part of one's essence, surely a higher level of honor than a mere kiss? And he would use this as an analogy to explain how one should view Simchas Torah. First, we express our love for the Torah by dancing with it and kissing it. However, when the hakafos have ended and the Yom Tov has drawn to a close, We must translate that expression of love into renewed dedication to Torah study.

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ It was the festival of Simchas Torah. As it was Sunday, the German guards at a camp factory were nowhere to be seen. Someone began to sing the holiday song MiPi Kel aloud: "There is none as powerful as Hashem, there is none as blessed as [Moshe] Amram's son, there is no greatness like the Torah, no one expounds it like Israel!" Suddenly, the factory chief appeared. The singer stopped in mid-sentence. "What is going on here? Tell me," the chief said, turning to Joseph Friedenson, "what is he singing?" "Well, sir," Mr. Friedenson replied, "today is a Jewish holiday and I guess you can say that he was praying more than singing." "Tell me what the words mean!" Mr. Friedenson translated the Hebrew into German. The German was dumbstruck. "Do you really believe those words, Friedenson?" Before Mr. Friedenson could reply, a young, unlearned Jew jumped to his feet and said, "Yes, I believe!" The German walked away, shaking his head and muttering, "Incredible! I am afraid that we will never succeed against you people."

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ On Simchas Torah night the yeshivah students would come to escort Reb Baruch Ber from his house amid singing and dancing. One year, several Bachurim decided to close the women's section so that no women would come to the yeshivah. That year, Reb Baruch Ber refused to leave his house. When asked why, he replied that he'd heard that the women's section had been closed; "On Simchas Torah, we have the opportunity to increase the Torah's honor in the eyes of the women, when they see how happy a Ben Torah is with the Torah. The Torah's honor is greatly diminished in our times. Not every girl understands a ben Torah's worth and is willing to marry one. This is our opportunity to demonstrate this to them, and on this day of all days they close the women's section?!" Only after he was promised that the women's section would be opened did he agree to set out for the yeshivah.

In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

28. Not to Desecrate Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 154

As the Torah says, on the eighth day there shall be a holy convocation for you, it is a solemn assembly, you shall do no laborious work (Vayikra 23:36, Parshas Emor)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Atzeres means gathering. Shemini Atzeres is the very pinnacle of the large cycle of the Regalim, the pilgrimages, and the smaller cycle of the Yamim Noraim, the High Holidays. This is a day to "gather in" all of the inspirational messages of the last three Regalim, as well as the reconciliatory messages of all of the Yamim Noraim. When we absorb all of those ideas together, it is manifest in an explosion of joy in being close to Hashem, a joy in us having the Torah, and a joy of being Jewish. The confluence of the powerful messages of all of the Yamim Tovim all serve to inspire us to keep the Torah in order to perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

ROSH HASHANAH: THE DAY OF JUDGMENT & CORONATION

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section relate to observing Rosh Hashanah. These are days that call us to introspect and recommit ourselves to observing Hashem's will and perfecting our character.

29. To Rest on Rosh Hashanah

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 29

As the Torah says, in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a Shabbos… a holy convocation (Vayikra 23:24, Parshas Emor)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- In Israel, for how many days do they keep Rosh Hashanah?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic laws governing the cessation of prohibited labor on Rosh Hashanah are identical to those of the first day of Pesach, permitting only the preparation of food (ochel nefesh) and its essential needs.

By rabbinic enactment, Rosh Hashanah is observed for two full days everywhere, both within Eretz Yisroel and throughout the Diaspora.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

On the anniversary of the creation of the world, Hashem decides and "recreates" the fate of the next year. This is a day set aside for us to introspect and to commit to live the next year in accordance with the will of Hashem, our King. This introspection and commitment helps us to perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• Why is the day called Rosh HaShanah, the “head” of the year, rather than merely the beginning of the year? The Sfas Emes explains that Rosh Hashanah is the point before the Divine heavenly flow of blessing (hashpa'ah) has divided into the many forms it will take during the year. When the divine life-force (chiyus) of Hashem enters the physical world, it passes into time and nature and becomes expressed through many different circumstances.

Rosh Hashanah stands before that division. The beginning of the year is therefore a time to become nullified (batel) to the spiritual root (shoresh), before the details of life begin to pull a person in different directions (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5632).

• If Hashem renews the world every Rosh Hashanah, the Sfas Emes explains why that renewal itself produces judgment. Chazal say that creation was formed "with their conscious awareness" (le-da'atan)—according to the spiritual awareness (da'as) and orientation of each created being. The same process occurs every year. The amount and form of the new divine life-force (chiyus) a person receives depends upon the person he has made himself capable of becoming. Therefore, says the Sfas Emes, the strict judgment (din) is not an unrelated event added to the renewal. The coming year itself is waiting to be formed, and the question is what portion of its new divine life-force (chiyus), spiritual awareness (da'as), and spiritual possibility he has prepared himself to receive (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5644).

• Throughout the prayers (tefillos) of Rosh Hashanah we ask: "Remember us for life, O King Who delights in life!" The Sfas Emes asks us to think carefully about what "life" means. When Adam HaRishon was created, the Torah says, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." The Sfas Emes explains that the physical world represents a spiritual descent (yeridah) and Divine contraction (tzimtzum) of Divine life-force (chiyus) into nature. Man was created as the spiritual vessel (kli) through which creation could be reconnected upward to the Source of life. Similarly, when we say "inscribe us in the Book of Life, for Your sake, O living God," Klal Yisrael asks to receive life to use its life for the purpose for which Hashem gives it. Rosh Hashanah is therefore the annual opportunity for the Divine life within man to become primary again (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5663).

• Rosh Hashanah is called the Day of Remembrance (Yom HaZikaron), but Hashem does not forget. The Sfas Emes therefore asks what we are requesting when we pray to be remembered before Him. Every creature is remembered and judged on this day in any case. Why should Klal Yisrael actively request to be remembered when that very remembrance brings judgment? His answer is extraordinary. A Jew must understand that it is worthwhile to undergo the judgment simply for the privilege of being brought before Hashem. The gift of Yom HaZikaron is not only that Hashem will remember something good about us. This is one of the deepest meanings of the day. The greatest blessing is not to hide from Hashem, but to be brought into His presence (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5639).

• How can Rosh Hashanah be both a Day of Judgment (Yom HaDin) and a Yom Tov festival (Yom Tov)? The Sfas Emes answers that we misunderstand the purpose of Divine judgment when we imagine it only as punishment. He calls Rosh Hashanah an aspect (bechinas) of "the Chamber of Merit" (Heichal Zechus) and explains the name with a striking sentence: Hashem judges because He desires to bring man to spiritual merit (zechus) and to the purpose for which he was created. The Jew can tremble before the strict judgment (din) and at the same time know that the very existence of that strict judgment (din) is a lovingkindness (chesed): Hashem has not abandoned him to remain what he was. He is being judged because a new year and a new possibility of spiritual rectification (tikkun) are being offered to him (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5635).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss what happens on Rosh Hashanah
- What does it mean that we are judged on Rosh Hashanah?

▪ Discuss how our parnasah, income for the year is decided on Rosh Hashanah.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Yeshivah of Slabodka was founded by Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the Alter of Slabodka. For Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah the bachurim were in the yeshivah. The Simchas Torah celebrations began with all the Bnei Yeshivah gathered together before the Alter joined them. They would begin with singing joyous songs reflecting the festive mood of Simchas Torah. After a short while the Alter would join them and with his arrival they would halt their singing. Once it became quiet, the Alter would speak, sharing his thoughts and then the singing would continue. Rav Moshe Reuven Finkel, the son of the Alter, who married the daughter of Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, the Rosh Yeshivah of Slabodka had moved to Eretz Yisroel to join the yeshivah in Chevron. In 5676 (1925) word had reached Slabodka before Succos that Rav Moshe Reuven was very ill. By Shmini Atzeres there was a rumor that a telegram had arrived from Eretz Yisroel that Rav Moshe Finkel was niftar. That Simchas Torah when the bnei yeshivah gathered together in anticipation for the Alter's arrival they decided that they would not sing, out of deference to the tragedy of the Alter's son's passing. When the Alter arrived he realized that the festive mood was absent. He got up and presented the following thought. The Gemara in Eruchin tells how the angels ask Hashem why His people do not recite hallel on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem responds to them that on the day when the books of life and death are open they need not recite hallel before Me. Tosfos, the commentary, points out that evidently, the angels do recite Hallel even though they, too, are being judged. If they do not recite hallel because of the judgment, how can they expect the Jewish people to recite Hallel. Tosfos, therefore concludes that the prayers of our Rosh Hashanah davening should reflect that the angels recite hallel. The Alter then asked the bachurim; "In our yeshivah, however, the Rosh Hashanah prayers reflect that the angels do not recite hallel. If so, how can the angels expect that we should recite hallel when they do not? Just as they do not recite because of the books of life and death, so it is a day of judgment for the Jewish people as well." The Alter then told the bachurim; "The answer is that although the angels cannot be expected to recite hallel on their day of judgment, but the Jewish people are Hashem's soldiers. If a soldier is told to sing and to rejoice, he does that. And he does it with enthusiasm. Therefore the angels ask why are the Jewish people not reciting hallel, are they not your soldiers? To this Hashem responds that since I am in the mode of judging it is not necessary for there to be singing and rejoicing." And then the Alter concluded "Although my son passed away, today is a day for us to rejoice with Hashem's Torah. A soldier sings and dances when it is appropriate. Today is appropriate to rejoice, so let us rejoice."

As told by Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l to Paysach Diskind

❖ In his old age Reb Elazar Rokeiach of Amsterdam made the voyage to Eretz Yisrael and on the way, on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, a fearful tempest broke out. The ship sprang a leak. Afraid for their lives, the passengers tried desperately to bail out the water. The aged scholar meanwhile sat tranquilly in his cabin, engaged in holy meditation. Seeing the water rising rapidly, his two traveling companions cried out to him: "Can't you see that we are in dreadful trouble? The ship is soon going to founder, God forbid!" "If that is the case," he answered enthusiastically, 11 then prepare yourselves to be in my cabin punctually at the first glimmer of day. Have our shofar ready, so that we will be able to fulfill the commandment which belongs to this day." And so they did. But as soon as the tzaddik blew the shofar, a wind came from above, the turbulent breakers calmed down - and the grateful passengers thanked the Creator for having spared them. "Do not think," commented Reb Simchah Bunem of Pshischah, "that Reb Elazar intended the blowing of the shofar to act as a segulah which would serve to quite the storm. Such a thought did not even occur to him. But when he was told how great was the danger in which they stood, and realized that according to all the laws of nature it was impossible for them to be saved, he was overwhelmed by a deep desire to fulfill the mitzvah of blowing the shofar once more before his death. And so holy a man was he, that the mitzvah saved them all."

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 40

❖ One Rosh Hashanah afternoon, a group of the ba'alei batim in Brisk came to the home of Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk to receive his blessing and to enjoy a few precious moments of this awesome day in his holy presence. They sat around the table observing the rav, who was meditating intensely, his face afire with fear of judgment. Every so often a sigh would emerge from deep within him. One of the men asked, why does the rav sigh? Surely he is at least in the category of beinoni, the Gemara says of such a person that he needs to do only one mitzvah to tip the scales to the side of merit! Let the rav do a mitzvah, and he assure himself of being on the side of merit!" The Rav jumped up from his place. "Beinoni? You believe I am in the category of beinoni?" he asked. "If I knew for sure that I was in the category of beinoni, I would run around the streets of Brisk kissing every man I saw from the great joy of being in the category of beinoni!"

The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 36

❖ One particular year, before Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Kotler pointed out to Amos Bunim that what one sows in life one reaps after death. The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah says, "There are three types of people who come for judgment on Yom HaDin [the Day of Judgment]: tzaddikim [the righteous], benonim [the average] and resha'im [the wicked]." Tosafos (Talmudic commentator) adds, "Every man is judged at the time of techiyas ha-mesim [resurrection of the dead]." Rabbi Kotler said that he could understand that a person is judged at the end of every year and at the end of his life. Yet it is difficult to understand why a person should be judged again at techiyas ha-mesim, if he was already judged at the end of his life. What good or evil could he have done after his death? Reb Aaron said, "Rashi [Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak — eleventh-century commentator on Scriptures and Talmud] is still learning Chumash and Gemara with us and is still teaching us. His influence lives on, and his zechus [spiritual merit] grows. He explained that a person's record does not end when he dies. It depends on the fruits of his labors, how much good he accomplished and how much the world benefited from those deeds. The influences (both good and evil) that remain after one's life are part of his judgment."

A Fire in His Soul, By Amos Bunim, Published by Feldheim

❖ For many years, Rav Pam was the makri (announcer) in" Torah Vodaath on Rosh Hashanah during the shofar-blowing. The makri not only announces which sound should be blown next, but more important, is the one who must decide whether or not the previous sound was halachically valid. Each year at the conclusion of Mussaf, Rav Pam would approach the baal toke'a and ask forgiveness in case he had erred in asking him to repeat even one sound.

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Simchah Yehudah Rosenbaum, a resident of Mattersdorf, Yerushalayim, is the rosh kollel of Kollel Mayim Chaim of Kiryat Sefer. One year, on Motzaei Yom Kippur, Rabbi Rosenbaum and his sons had returned from shul, after making Havdalah, sat down with the rest of the family to break their fast. Shortly thereafter, the Rosenbaum clan was set to head outside to place schach on their succah, as is customary. Each year, the children look forward to putting the finishing touches on their succah as the quasi-Yom Tov of Motzaei Yom Kippur gets underway. But before the Rosenbaum kids could go outside, their father stopped them. He had an idea. "It's been a long day. We spent hours engaged in heartfelt tefillah. We have all undertaken numerous kabbalos. We've accepted upon ourselves to improve in various ways. Let us each sit down for five minutes and put into writing our kabbalos for the coming year. This will help us concretize our commitment and ensure that we follow through on our pledges." The children complied, sitting down at the table with pen and paper to write down their kabbalos as their father shepped nachas and did the same. Not more than a couple of minutes had passed before they heard a loud crash outside their apartment. The noise had come from the direction of their succah. Running outside, Rabbi Rosenbaum and his children were shocked by what they saw. A retractable roof had landed squarely on their succah. They quickly surmised that one of their upstairs neighbors had been opening his retractable roof, a feature quite common in apartments in that area, to work on his succah, and the roof had become dislodged. The roof slid off its tracks and fell to the ground below. At the very moment that the roof plummeted down, Rabbi Rosenbaum and his children could have been standing in their succah, putting up their schach. It was only because of Rabbi Rosenbaum's creative idea

for them to write down their Yom Kippur kabbalos that they were instead sitting inside. It was clear to Rabbi Rosenbaum and his family that those kabbalos wouldn't only earn them zechuyos during their year ahead. In fact, those kabbalos were apparently already paying dividends, protecting them from a potential tragedy.

From Powerful Moments By Rabbi Yitzchok Hissiger

❖ Similarly, before coming to lakewood, the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon, would periodically come to America to say shmuessen and be mashpia on the bachurim of Yeshivah Torah Temimah. His hosts during those visits were R' and Mrs. Yaakov Applegrad. On one such Shabbos, there had been a large crowd. So, by the time Shabbos was over, the mound of dirty dishes was quite large. Without a moment's hesitation, the Mashgiach, without his kapote and with his shirtsleeves rolled up, walked upstairs from his room in the basement and in the Queen's English asked, "May I be of assistance in the kitchen?" It was a different location - the beis midrash of Beis Medrash Govoha. It was a different cleaning need - instead of dirty dishes, there were dirty tissues on the floor. But it was the same person cleaning. When R' Zalman" walked into the beis midrash long before davening on Rosh Hashanah morning, he was surprised to see that Rav Mattisyahu was already there. What was Rav Mattisyahu doing there so early in the morning? He was picking up tissues from the floor...

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Rav of Charkov, R. Moshe Solomon, once asked The Brisker Rav why he chose to fill his free time on Rosh Hashanah by reciting Tehillim. "Wouldn't it be better instead to learn Gemara?" The Brisker Rav responded: "On Rosh Hashanah, every Jew feels like a businessman who was very wealthy, but suddenly went bankrupt and has been left penniless. In such a situation, of course, the first thing to do to put such a person back on his feet is to give him money to start over. Now, there is no doubt that learning Gemara is the most significant "capital" there is, and this is how I used to spend Rosh Hashanah when I was young. However, when one learns deeply, one naturally comes up with questions, and then one must take the time to go to the bookcase and find sefarim to help answer them. The walk to and from the bookcase wastes a certain amount of time, something very undesirable on Rosh Hashanah. I therefore accustomed myself to saying Tehillim during my free time on Rosh Hashanah, since there is no danger of wasting time: Tehillim are said one after another with no breaks at all.

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 608

❖ One year, two avreichim in the kehillah who were both waiting to be blessed with children contended for Maftir Chana which is renowned as a great segulah for zera shel kayama. Most years, the bidding culminated with a maximum of several hundred shekels, but that year, both men were determined to purchase the aliyah, regardless of the cost. Before long, the bids rose beyond five hundred shekels which, considering the financial situation of young avreichim living in the small town of Ofakim, was a substantial sum of money. When one avreich faltered momentarily, his friend stood up and, thereby sharing in the costs of purchasing the aliyah, doubled the bid on his behalf to one thousand shekels! Not to be outdone, friends of the second avreich also backed the latter, and before long there were two camps in the shul and the bids were skyrocketing, reaching historic sums for the modest shul in Ofakim. Throughout the bidding, Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus sat in his seat, his bones trembling in awe of Yom HaDin, yet uncomfortable with the proceedings. On one hand, he identified with the parties, which were both committed to purchase this zechus and segulah for their friends; yet he also knew that the sums were rising uncontrollably, and that the bids were beyond the means of the relatively poor members of his community. Finally, when the bid jumped again this time to truly unprecedented heights and it appeared that the other side was about to respond, the Rav rose to his full height and shouted, "Enough! Stop bidding! Whoever is waiting to be blessed shall be blessed!" A shocked silence descended upon the shul. Everyone was aware of the gravity of this situation, and they all wondered how Rav Shimshon had publicly accepted responsibility for this on his shoulders... Time would tell that these were not careless words or empty promises spoken in a moment's anxiety. That year, the avreich who ultimately

purchased the aliyah was blessed with twins, and the avreich who had not acquired the aliyah... with triplets! "What a shame that I wasn't there!" lamented another member of the kehillah who was also waiting for children, but had spent Rosh Hashanah with his family out of town.

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

❖ A talmid would bring his family before each Rosh Hashanah to receive a brachah from Reb Shmuel Auerbach. "One year, Rosh Hashanah was Wednesday evening, and we went to him during the day on Tuesday. I asked him for a brachah for the coming year, and he said to me, 'What about this year? You don't want a brachah for this year?" I said I had come for a brachah for a successful new year, and he repeated the question. We went back and forth like this two or three more times until in the end, he gave me a brachah for this year. "That night, I went with my wife to the Kosel. When we returned home, she went into the kitchen, where she had left a big pot of compote cooking on the stove. As she took it off the fire, the entire pot overturned, scalding her in several places, none very seriously. When we got to the hospital, the doctors told her, 'You had malachim watching over you to make sure that you weren't more seriously injured.'

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

❖ The mitzvah of sounding the shofar is very special. It is a once-a-year mitzvah, which has so many symbolic meanings. The shofar is an arousal call to teshuvah, it is a proclamation of the sovereignty of G-d, and it is a reminder of the total devotion of the patriarch Abraham, who was ready to bring his beloved son Yitzchak as an offering if that was the Divine will. Many people say additional portions of Tehillim before the sounding of the shofar, others read appropriate passages of the Zohar, others immerse themselves in the mikveh, and yet others do all of the above. Rabbi Yeshayah of Kerestier used to seclude himself in his study before the shofar blowing, and one of his chassidim, curious to see how the Rebbe prepared himself for the mitzvah, looked through the keyhole.' He was surprised to see that the Rebbe was cutting up the cake so that the worshipers could refresh themselves after the long services were over! The Rebbes concern to satiate the hunger of the worshipers took precedence even over reading from the Zohar. What is the relevance of preparing cake to the mitzvah of shofar? The Rebbe was fulfilling the ahavas Yisrael component of the mitzvah. Sounding the shofar without doing something to make others feel good would be an incomplete mitzvah.

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ One year, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv was released from the hospital shortly before Rosh Hashanah; and he had to sit for most of the prayers, even during Shemoneh Esrei. Yet he stood while the shofar was blown and acted as makri. When a confidant, Rav Meshulam Deutsch questioned him about this, he explained that although it is more important to stand during Shemoneh Esrei than during shofar blowing as the makri he had an added, more significant reason to stand: out of respect for the tzibbur.

Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 472

30. Not to Desecrate Rosh Hashanah

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 150

As the Torah says, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month... You shall do no laborious work (Vayikra 23:24, Parshas Emor)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

On the anniversary of the creation of the world, Hashem decides and "recreates" the fate of the next year. This is a day set aside for us to introspect and to commit to live the next year in accordance with the will of Hashem, our King. This introspection and commitment helps us to perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

31. To Listen to the Shofar

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 30

As the Torah says, it shall be for you a day of blowing the horn (Bamidbar 29:1, Parshas Pinchas)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which animals must the shofar come from?
- What shape must it have?
- How many sounds must one hear on Rosh Hashanah?
- Why do we blow much more than that?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The shofar must ideally be the curved horn of a ram, symbolizing humility of heart and evoking the enduring merit of the Binding of Yitzchak (Akeidas Yitzchak).

The horns of non-kosher animals, as well as the horn of a cow or bull (keren), are fundamentally invalid for fulfilling this mitzvah.

Under biblical law, one is obligated to hear nine sounds of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah: three sets consisting of a teki'ah (a clear, unbroken blast), a teru'ah (a series of short, broken sounds), and a teki'ah.

Because Chazal recognized a halachic doubt regarding whether the biblical teru'ah resembles intermittent sighs (shevarim), staccato sobs (teru'ah), or a combination of both, the Sages instituted blowing all three variations: three sets of teki'ah-shevarim-teru'ah-teki'ah (Tashrat), three sets of teki'ah-shevarim-teki'ah (Tashat), and three sets of teki'ah-teru'ah-teki'ah (Tarat), thereby fulfilling the obligation beyond any doubt.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The call of shofar contains many lessons (see below) that strive to lift us up from our moral slumber and inspire us to devote our lives to coming close to Hashem by perfecting our character and ourselves with the Torah and Mitzvos.

Listening to the shofar's call fills us with a spiritual influence that inspires us to improve and perfect our character.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

GEMARA ROSH HASHANAH 16

When we blow the Shofar it recalls the Akeida of Yitzchak, and it is as if we did the Akeida ourselves.

RAMBAM — HILCHOS TESHUVA 3, 4

The Shofar inspires us to wake up from our moral and spiritual slumber.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 402)

The broken sounds of the Shofar remind us to try to break our old habits and break free from the clutch of the Yetzer Hara.

The bent horn of the Shofar tells us to turn to Hashem after we break free from the Yetzer Hara.

AVUDRAHAM TAIMEI HATEKIOS

The Avudraham offers many symbolic interpretations of the Shofar. Here are several of them:

Rosh Hashanah is the time when Hashem first became king by creating man. We blow the Shofar on the anniversary of creation to once again coronate Hashem as our king. We are reaccepting Hashem as our king on the day that Hashem first became king.

The Shofar helps us to recall the Shofar of Har Sinai, and calls us to commit ourselves to the Torah taught on Har Sinai.

The Shofar helps us recall the war horns of our enemies who put us in exile, and we pray to be redeemed from this exile.

The Shofar helps recall the future Shofar of the redemption, and we hope and to pray to merit hearing that Shofar.

This Shofar recalls the Shofar that will be blown during the "yom hadin hagadol", the great judgment day before the souls of the dead return to the earth, and the onset of heaven on earth.

RAV SAADIA GAON

The broken sounds of the shofar remind us to develop hearts that are broken and humble.

SFAS EMES

• The blessing over the mitzvah is not “to blow the Shofar,” but to hear the sound of the Shofar. The Sfas Emes explains this through the Midrashic teaching: at Har Sinai, Klal Yisrael said “we will do and we will hear” (na'aseh v'nishma). Through later sins, the realm of “we will do” (na'aseh)—our ability to carry Hashem’s will into action—was damaged. But the deeper power of “we will hear and understand” (nishma) was not destroyed. The ability of the Jewish soul to listen and receive Hashem’s word comes from a higher place than action and remains present even when our deeds have fallen. On Rosh Hashanah we first return to “we will hear and understand” (nishma),

to the receptive point that has never been completely ruined, and from that renewed spiritual listening (shemi'ah) we hope once again to reach proper sacred speech (dibbur) and physical deed (ma'aseh). The Shofar thus begins the rebuilding of a Jew from the inside outward (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5633).

• The Sfas Emes repeatedly distinguishes between inner voice (kol) and sacred speech (dibbur). Speech takes the simple voice and divides it into letters, words, languages, and different forms of expression. Because of this, sacred speech (dibbur) can change. It can be twisted, misused, or made to express something very different from the person's inner truth. But before the voice is divided into words there is a simple inner voice (kol), and that inner voice (kol) does not change. The Shofar uses the pure inner voice (kol) emerging through the windpipe (kaneh), before it becomes entangled with the lower physical faculties. Thus Shofar reveals the inner voice of Yaakov (kol Yaakov) which sin may cover but cannot fundamentally change (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5652).

• Chazal describe the Shofar as an awakening of divine wisdom (chochmah). The Sfas Emes sees in the word chochmah the words koach mah—the power of humble self-nullification before Hashem. The first sin entered the world through the Tree of Knowledge (Eitz HaDa'as). Human spiritual awareness (da'as) became mixed with good and evil (tov va-ra), and man began to follow "many scheming calculations" (cheshbonos rabbim). Therefore, on Rosh Hashanah, the true wise sage (chacham) does not rely on his own cleverness. He places his own understanding aside and simply cries. Even when a person cannot explain how he deserves to come close to Hashem, and even when his own accomplishments do not seem sufficient to reach his spiritual root (shoresh), he can cry from the place of self-nullification (bittul). That simple inner voice (kol) itself reaches deeper than the complicated spiritual awareness (da'as) that became mixed through sin (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5660).

• The Sfas Emes says explicitly that before the sin of Adam HaRishon, man possessed a clearer and purer form. This level was prepared to be restored at Matan Torah, when Klal Yisrael reached the level of "I said: You are angelic beings," but the Chet HaEgel again damaged it. Shofar calls man back toward that original spiritual level (madreigah). The Sfas Emes connects this to Chazal's statement that the beauty of Yaakov Avinu was a reflection of the beauty of Adam HaRishon (shufreh de-Yaakov Avinu me'ein shufreh de-Adam HaRishon). Elsewhere the Sfas Emes calls this restoration "the spiritual beauty of Adam" (shufra de-Adam). Rosh Hashanah is therefore about far more than repairing individual sins: the Shofar awakens the deeper human being (adam) beneath them and the divine image that Hashem originally intended man to reveal (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5646).

• The Gemara teaches that because Shofar comes for remembrance (zikaron), it brings our innermost soul before the King. The Sfas Emes understands this as far more than a technical halachic classification. During the Shalosh Regalim, Klal Yisrael had the mitzvah of appearing physically before Hashem in the Beis HaMikdash. Rosh Hashanah is different. It is at the covered moon (ba-keseh), a day when the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) is hidden. Elsewhere he explains that Hashem recognizes the voice of Yaakov (kol Yaakov) through recognizing the familiarity of the voice (tevi'us eina de-kala), just as a person can be recognized by his voice. Shofar therefore does far more than remind Hashem of something from the past. It brings the true Jew himself before Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5651).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Why is the akeida so important?
- Why is there a great judgment day before the resurrection, if we are all judged after we die?

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Eliezer was the ba'al toke'a, the person who blows the shofar, on Rosh Hashanah. As everyone was preparing to hear the shofar for the first time, Eliezer noticed Daniel standing next to him at his shtender, dozing off. Eliezer recited the berachah, and just as he was about to blow the shofar, a silly idea popped into his mind. Daniel, still standing and asleep next to him, hadn't stirred. Eliezer thought, "What if I move the shofar closer to this guy's ear and blow it? It'll definitely wake him up!" After all, the shofar is meant to symbolize a spiritual awakening, so why not make it a physical awakening as well for this poor fellow? So Eliezer moved the shofar close to Daniel's ear and began to blow. Daniel jumped up, clearly startled and visibly shaken. Eliezer continued blowing the shofar as required. After Eliezer finished, Daniel turned to him and said, "I completely forgive you for waking me up and startling me. I know you didn't mean to hurt me, but I want you to know, I actually can't hear anything out of my ear right now. You may have caused some hearing damage. I forgive you, but you should know that you might have committed an aveirah (a transgression)." Daniel continued: "We know that a mitzvah done through a transgression, a mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah, is not considered a valid mitzvah. For example, if someone steals money to buy matzah, he does not fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah. The same goes for a stolen lulav, it doesn't count. So if you hurt me, possibly causing physical harm while performing the mitzvah, then your blowing of the shofar might not have been valid. And if that's the case, it's possible that no one else fulfilled their obligation by hearing your shofar either." "So I think you should find out from a Rav whether everyone who heard your shofar might need to hear it again." What do you think? Is this considered a mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah that would invalidate the mitzvah, not just for Eliezer, but for everyone who heard the shofar? On one hand, one could argue yes: the mitzvah was performed by harming someone, and therefore it shouldn't count. But maybe you could argue that this case is different from a stolen lulav or matzah, because here, the shofar itself was kosher. The transgression wasn't in the object but in a separate action that happened at the same time. Or perhaps maybe you could say that the exact sound of the shofar, the one used to fulfill the mitzvah, was also the source of the harm. That same sound caused both a mitzvah and an aveirah, so perhaps it should be considered a mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah. What do you think? Would this disqualify the mitzvah for the one who blew the shofar, and for everyone else who heard it?

Answer: Regarding the question about the man who blew the shofar, Rabbi Zilberstein does not give a conclusive answer and presents opinions that consider it a problem, as well as opinions that do not. Rav Akiva Meister answered that we pasken this would not be considered a mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah, and the person who blew the shofar, along with everyone else, would fulfill their mitzvah of shofar.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Sanhedrin, p. 378

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Baal Shem Tov once instructed his disciple Reb Wolff Kitzis to study the kabbalistic kavanos on which he would meditate while blowing the various blasts of the shofar, in readiness for the prayers of Rosh Hashanah in his synagogue. Reb Wolff studied the mystical significations of the Divine Names associated with this mitzvah, and made notes of them on a sheet of paper which he put away in a pocket, so that he would be able to read them while blowing the shofar. The Baal Shem Tov was not pleased by the fact that he had committed these secrets to writing; the sheet of paper slipped out of its pocket and was lost. The awesome moment drew near. Reb Wolff searched his pockets in vain, and was obliged to blow the shofar without knowing which divine mysteries to meditate upon. This grieved him no end, and he wept with a broken and humbled heart. After the prayers the Baal Shem Tov said to him: "In a king's palace there are many chambers, and each door

has its own particular key. But there is one implement which can open all the doors, and that is - the ax. The Kabbalistic kavanos are the keys to the gates in the World Above, each gate requiring its own particular Kavanah - but a broken and humble heart can burst open all the gates and all the heavenly palaces."

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 39

❖ Rabbi Pesach Krohn told over the following story. Nachman was a frum man. He had a cousin, Nati, who was not religious. While Nachman made Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael, Nati did the opposite, leaving Eretz Yisrael to move to Miami. Every once in a while, Nachman would come back to America for business. He would always go to Miami to see Nati. Of course, he couldn't eat in Nati's home. They would go out to a kosher restaurant, or Nachman would buy food from a kosher takeout place, and they'd eat together using disposable paper goods. One year, Nachman came to Miami, and noticed that Nati's yarmulke was sitting perfectly on his head. Usually, Nachman could tell that Nati had put on the yarmulke just five minutes before Nachman arrived. But this time, it seemed like he had been wearing it all along. Nachman looked around and saw a mezuzah on every doorpost, and there was even a sefer on the table. He asked Nati, "Has there been a change around here?" Nati replied, "Yeah, my wife and I became religious." Nachman couldn't believe it. He hugged and kissed him and said, "How? That's wonderful!" Nati told him an amazing story: He said, "Two years ago, on a hot afternoon, my wife and I were sitting on our front porch when we noticed a group of people heading toward the water. The men were all dressed in beautiful suits, shirts, and ties -- not at all like people going swimming. The women were dressed as if it was a holiday. And then I remembered, 'Oh my gosh, it's Rosh Hashanah. These people are going to Tashlich.' I hadn't been to Tashlich in years, not since I was a kid in Eretz Yisrael. I don't know why, but I decided, ' I'm going to put on my kippah, and I'm going to follow these people.' So, I started walking behind them. People noticed me; I wasn't dressed like them, just this kippah planted on my head. Someone came over to me with a Machzor and asked, 'Do you read Hebrew?' I said, 'Of course, I'm an Israeli.' He asked, 'Would you like to say this prayer?' I said, 'I used to do it as a kid. It's been a long time, but I'm happy to do it.' So, I read the paragraph. Then, another fellow came over to me and asked, 'Did you hear shofar today?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'I have a shofar with me; I'm the baal tokea in the shul. Would you like to hear it? It's Rosh Hashanah.' I said, 'Yeah, I know. I didn't hear shofar today. That would be nice.' He blew the shofar, and everyone turned around because it's not typical to blow shofar during Tashlich. When he finished, I turned to leave, and the man said, 'Wait! My name is Moshe Katz. If you ever want to come to the shul or if you have any questions, you can always call me or the rabbi.' I wasn't really interested; I didn't care what his name was. But as I turned to leave, he insisted, 'Don't forget, my name is Moshe Katz.' I thought, 'Okay, whatever.' When I got home, Zahava asked, 'So, what happened?' I told her the whole story -- how this guy came over, introduced himself, and blew shofar for me. And suddenly, Zahava's face turned white. She said, 'What did you say? Who blew shofar for you?' I replied, 'Moshe Katz. Why does it matter?' She said, 'Moshe Katz -- that was my grandfather's name! He was the baal tokea in Bialystok. He blew shofar there. I can't believe that the same name -- Moshe Katz -- is the person who blew shofar for you. It's like he came back!' Zahava and I felt that this was orchestrated by G-d. It couldn't be a coincidence that the man who blew shofar for me was named Moshe Katz. Shortly after, I decided to go to the shul. We talked with the rabbi, met Moshe Katz, and slowly but surely, we became baalei teshuvah." Nachman hugged his cousin again, amazed by the story. Upon his return to Eretz Yisroel he went to see Rav Chaim Kanievsky and told him the whole story and asked, "Rebbe, if Hashem wanted my cousin Nati and Zahava to become religious, why didn't He send Moshe Katz to them years ago? Why did He wait until now?" Rav Chaim responded, "Hashem waits for someone to take the first step. Once Nati put on his kippah and joined the others for Tashlich, Hashem said, 'You took the first step, now I'll send you Moshe Katz.'" Hashem waits for us all Ten Days.

Table Talk, Edition 410 (Parshas Yom Kippur), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ R' Gedalyah Sheinin, a member of tiferes bachurim, has served as the baal tokei'a in Tiferes Bachurim for 30 years. He would also go to Rav Elyashiv's house to blow shofar after the Rosh Hashanah prayers in order to blow the shevarim sounds in several different ways, to fulfill different opinions of how they should be blown. In 5754/ 1994, he went to Rav Elyashiv's

house to blow shofar after the prayers, and then asked whether he should go into the room where the Rebbetzin was lying ill and blow for her. (The Rebbetzin was suffering from her final illness and could not go to shul; she passed away in Tamuz of that year.) Rav Elyashiv responded that women are exempt from the mitzvah of shofar, and they only accepted it upon themselves as a hiddur. But when the first day of Rosh Hashanah is Shabbos, shofar is blown only on the second day, and the hiddur is of a Rabbinic obligation, not a Torah obligation. Considering that the Rebbetzin was exempt due to her illness, Rav Elyashiv said that it was not necessary for R' Gedalyah to exert himself to blow for the Rebbetzin. R' Gedalyah left Rav Elyashiv's house and headed home. He had not gone very far when he heard the voice of Rav Elyashiv, who had come out of his apartment into his sukkah and was calling in a loud voice from above the stairs, "Gedalyah! Gedalyah!" R' Gedalyah was astounded. Calling out in a loud voice was entirely out of character for Rav Elyashiv. Wondering what could have prompted Rav Elyashiv to do something so unusual, he ran back to the apartment. When he reentered, Rav Elyashiv said to him, "I told you not to exert yourself to blow shofar for the Rebbetzin due to the cheshbon that it was merely a hiddur mitzvah d'Rabbanan for someone who was exempt due to illness. But afterward, I thought it over more thoroughly and realized that there is a d'Oraysa here, and it is proper to blow for her. For it is a chessed; it will make her happy. And chessed is a d'Oraysa!"

Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 99

❖ George's family came to the United States from Uzbekistan and the Ukraine in the 1980's and settled in Maryland. Growing up in the Soviet Union, George's father remembers being called "the Zjid" - essentially the Dirty Jew - in school. He learned how to defend himself from physical attacks on a daily basis. This was common fare for every Jewish child in the USSR. Nobody let them forget that they were Jews for a moment. George, on the other hand, was raised in Frederick, Maryland and was one of the only Jews in his class in public school. Unlike his father, he kept his Jewish identity a secret out of fear of reprisals from the numerous KKK members in school. "I just wanted to blend in and be like everyone else," he said. Unlike their parents, the second generation doesn't have the same sense of Jewish pride and unless they connect with Judaism in a meaningful way, assimilation is inevitable. As a student in UMBC, George had no intention of getting involved with Judaism. He didn't realize that the day he met Rabbi Gavriel Horan on campus would change his life forever. George eventually became the president of the Jewish club on campus, participated in numerous Jewish learning fellowships, leadership retreats, and inspirational trips, and eventually got a kosher bris and a pair of tefillin. Last year, George met with a major Jewish philanthropist at a Jewish internship program in Lakewood, who encouraged him to start a program dedicated to Russian Jewish college students and young professionals like himself in Maryland. George is now working with Rabbi Gavriel Horan in building RAJE Maryland - a growth oriented community for young Russian Jews looking to explore their heritage. This Rosh Hashanah, in the merit of helping bring Hashem's children back home, He should blow the shofar gadol and bring all of us back home as well.

Table Talk, Edition 199 (Parshas Rosh Hashanah), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Reb Asher, a relative of Reb Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, related that he had once come to Premishlan to spend the Days of Awe in the presence of Reb Meir, and had stayed there until the end of Sukkos. Now during that period the tzaddik's daughter was so dangerously ill that by the time Simchas Torah came around she was at the point of death. The tzaddik, as always, was dancing exuberantly at the Rejoicing of the Law, when a group of chassidim rushed into the beis midrash with an outcry, imploring that he do something to call down the mercies of heaven on his daughter. The tzaddik (who out of unfeigned humility used to refer to himself in the third person, by his diminutive nickname, as "Meir'l") walked into her room. He saw at once how matters stood, and when he came out he said: "Master of the Universe! You commanded us to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah - and Meir'l blew; You commanded us to fast on Yom Kippur - and Meir'l fasted; You commanded us to dwell in the sukkah during the festival - and Meir'l dwelt in the sukkah; You commanded us to be happy on Simchas Torah - and Meir'l is happy. But now You've gone and caused his daughter to be sick. Meir'l, for his part, has to accept this state of affairs joyfully, for the Mishnah teaches us, 'A man is obliged to bless his Maker for grievous

tidings in the same way as he does for glad tidings.' And the Talmud explains that this means, 'to accept joyfully.' Meir'l therefore is accepting his lot joyfully. "But Ribbono shel Olam - Master of the Universe! Does the Halachah not establish the law that 'one may not mingle one joy with another?'" And immediately after, news came from his home that his daughter's fever was subsiding, and she recovered.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 237

YOM KIPPUR: THE DAY OF ATONEMENT & CLEANSING

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section relate to observing Yom Kippur. This is a day of repentance and prayer which helps us correct the results of our misdeeds, improve our character and recommit to live a purified future.

32. To Rest on Yom Kippur

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 31

As the Torah says It shall be for you a day of solemn rest (Vayikra 23:32, Parshas Emor)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Whoever performs prohibited labor on Yom Kippur violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh) and transgresses a negative commandment as well (see the section on negative commandments, §151). If one works deliberately, he incurs the penalty of kares (spiritual excision); if done unintentionally (be-shogeg), he must bring a sin-offering (chattas). Every category of creative labor prohibited on Shabbos is likewise prohibited on Yom Kippur.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we do something wrong, we become more impure, and less disciplined. We also trigger a butterfly effect of negative consequences that radiate out of that transgression. With the help of repentance, introspection, and commitment, Yom Kippur is a time for us to become purified from the inner (taharah) and outer (kapara) consequences of our poor choices, so that we can start the year fresh and pure. The purity and new commitment that we gain on Yom Kippur helps us to become more committed to the Torah which helps us to perfect our character.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Torah says before Hashem you shall be purified. He explains the prayer “Blot out our transgressions from before Your eyes” in a striking way. The request is that sin be removed from before Hashem’s eyes. Why phrase forgiveness this way? The Sfas Emes answers that when a Jew genuinely enters the state of standing before Hashem (lifnei Hashem), the sin cannot remain in the same form. He writes that through drawing close before Hashem, the sin itself is erased. His entry represents the capacity of Klal Yisrael to reach an inner place in the Divine relationship where external contamination falls away. Yom Kippur is therefore the day not only when Hashem removes distance, but when closeness itself dissolves distance (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5647).

• Rosh Hashanah begins the judgment; Yom Kippur brings that process toward completion. One might therefore expect Yom Kippur to represent stricter judgment (din). Instead, the Sfas Emes associates its deepest level with the attribute of "abundant in kindness" (ve-rav chesed). Ordinary chesed seems to mean that Hashem chooses kindness despite what strict justice would demand. The Sfas Emes describes a deeper possibility. When the true nature of the person is understood—when it becomes clear that the sin is not the essence of the Jewish soul—then purification itself can emerge through the strict judgment (din). The final judgment of Yom Kippur therefore reaches beyond the opposition between strict judgment (din) and lovingkindness (chesed). It reveals a place where true strict judgment (din) serves the Divine desire to restore the person to what he can be (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5656).

• Moshe descended with the second Luchos on Yom Kippur. The Sfas Emes sees this as central to the identity of the day. The first Luchos belonged to Israel before the Chet HaEgel. They represent Torah received by a nation still standing at the extraordinary purity of Sinai. The second Luchos came after failure, prayer, forgiveness, and teshuvah. They therefore reveal another relationship with Torah: the Torah available after a person has fallen and returned. This transforms Yom Kippur from a day concerned only with removing the past into a day of renewed Torah. Hashem does not only tell Israel, "I forgive you for the Egel." He gives them Luchos again (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5662).

• Rabbi Akiva famously concludes the Mishnah in Yoma with the comparison: Just as a mikveh purifies those who are impure, Hashem purifies Israel. The Sfas Emes hears more in this analogy than the simple idea that Hashem cleanses. A mikveh requires immersion. The person does not wash one finger at a time. His entire body enters an environment that surrounds him completely. So too on Yom Kippur, writes the Sfas Emes, the whole person must become batel to Hashem. He describes the day as a complete surrender of self to the Divine. The analogy to mikveh becomes exact. Purification occurs because the individual is surrounded by something larger than himself (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5641).

• In this teaching, the Sfas Emes may be the most important because it prevents every previous teaching from being misunderstood. Forgiveness is not the endpoint. The Sfas Emes says explicitly that Israel seeks forgiveness and pardon so that they will be able to serve Hashem with a pure heart. A person can desire forgiveness for many reasons. It feels good to receive a clean slate. The Sfas Emes asks for something more demanding: why do you want to be clean? This explains the placement of Yom Kippur immediately before Sukkos. The success of Yom Kippur therefore cannot be measured only by the intensity of the fast or the emotion of Neilah. Its real test begins afterward (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5651).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss why doing teshuvah on Yom Kippur is different than during the year.
- Discuss the specific effect of mechila, slicha, kapara, and taharah.
- Discuss how Yom Kipur purifies you, and corrects the kilkulim (negative effects) that are results of our aveiros.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

At the climactic Ne'ilah service at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the congregation's revered, saintly prayer leader (shaliach tzibbur) is physically frail and must remain seated throughout the prayer. A substitute candidate is completely healthy and capable of standing upright throughout Ne'ilah, but lacks the saintly stature and spiritual

elevation of the elder. Which is halachically preferable: having the saintly elder lead the congregation while seated, or having the less righteous candidate lead while standing?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein cites a ruling of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l that when choosing between two candidates before the prayer begins, one should choose a chazzan who can stand on his feet before the King rather than one who must sit. However, if a revered, pious chazzan who began leading Ne'ilah standing became faint from the Yom Kippur fast in the middle of the service, since his weakness itself came through the mitzvah of the fast and replacing him mid-prayer would cause him embarrassment, there is basis to allow him to conclude while leaning or seated.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 171

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One Yom Kippur Eve - so recounted Reb Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov - the Baal Shem Tov arrived at his beis midrash for the Kol Nidrei prayer in visible distress. After Kol Nidrei he rested a little while, and the worshipers around him saw that his melancholy vanished, and a new spirit animated him. In fact, he prayed the remainder of the evening service with joy and melody. When after Yom Kippur his elder disciples asked him the meaning of this change in mood, he told them that in a certain village there had lived a leaseholder who was very much liked by his estate-owner. When the poor man and his wife passed away, this gentile squire felt compassion for the little orphan they had left alone. He took the child into his home and his heart, and brought him up as his own. Needless to say he knew nothing of Jewish law and faith, but the squire told him that he was born to Jewish parents, and now that he had adopted him he would one day inherit all his possessions. He told him further of the few meager chattels that his parents had left behind them. He showed them to the child - mere oddments, a few Chumashim, and the Karban Minchah edition of the prayer book from which the child's mother used to pray daily - fond mementos of his unfortunate parents. One morning, in the days before Rosh Hashanah when people rise piously at dawn tb recite the penitential Selichos prayers, the child observed small groups of Jews from the neighboring villages huddled in wagons which trundled their way along the highway that led to town. "Where are you going?" asked the curious little boy. "Why," they said, "the Days of Awe are just around the corner. On Rosh Hashanah the verdict is inscribed, and on the fast of Yom Kippur it is sealed. So we're on our way to yonder big town to pray with all our brothers there. For God always has an ear for the prayers of the many!" From that moment the spirit of God stirred his soul, for he had long known that he was of Jewish stock. When he lay down to sleep that night his parents appeared to him in a dream. "Come back to your faith," they urged him. "You are a Jew!" Night after night, throughout the Ten Days of Penitence, he dreamed this dream. When he told his benefactor of it he made nothing of it - but that did not stop the dream from recurring. Indeed, one fearful night he even dreamed that his parents threatened to punish him if he did not return to the faith of his fathers. By the time Yom Kippur Eve came, he again saw wagonloads of Jews making their earnest way to town. "And why are going there today?" he asked. "We are getting ourselves ready for the Holy Day," they said, "for it is a day of forgiveness." He darted home, took his mother's Siddur out of his little bundle of belongings, and ran all the way to town. He arrived at shul breathless, just in time for Kol Nidrei. All around him stood the worshipers robed austerely in white, with their prayer books in their hands, and weeping quietly as they prayed. He too wept bitter tears, but the poor child did not know how to recite the prayers. With each anguished sob the seven heavens resounded. And the Baal Shem Tov, a witness from afar, shared the child's distress, and sought desperately to intercede in heaven that this wordless prayer be accepted, so that he be helped to remain constant in his resolve to follow the faith of his fathers. Then the boy cried out: "Master of the Universe! I don't know what to pray or how to pray. So here you are, Master of the Universe: I'm giving you my whole Siddur!" With this he bowed his head over the prayer book that lay open on the lectern before him, and wept honest tears. His prayer from that unread Siddur soared ever upward, and came to repose before the Throne of Mercy. And that was when the melancholy of the Baal Shem Tov had vanished, and a new spirit animated him, and he prayed with a melody in his heart.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 104

❖ A young woman came to speak to Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk about a private matter. He asked those present to leave the room. The girl burst into tears and revealed that she had gotten mixed up with a young man who was no good. Now she was going to give birth. Her situation was desperate. Reb Chaim, with his intense yiras Shamayim, was compassionate to people like this as well. He employed his classic distinction of "two dinim" here as well. He distinguished between the dreadful deed which had been done and the proper halachah that applied now, after the fact. The girl and her unborn child were Jewish souls in need of protection; they were not excluded from klal Yisrael and it would be a mitzvah to save their lives if necessary by desecrating Yom Kippur that fell on a Shabbos! Reb Chaim gave the young woman money to support herself, adding that she should bring the child to him after she gives birth. "I myself will take the child from you, and no one will know about it," he said, thus calming the turmoil within her. Several months passed. Then, late one night, while he was sitting in his room learning Torah, soft knocking was heard on the door. He emerged into the foyer where he saw the same sad young woman holding a baby in her arms. Without a word, he took the baby from her and sent her on her way. He then called Rebbetzin Lifsha Soloveitchik to care for the baby in the meantime. In the morning, as soon as he was able, Reb Chaim delivered the child to the care of a wet nurse, organizing her wages. This was one of many such incidents.

From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim

❖ In 1938 before Yom Kippur, the Belzer Rebbe had a minhag that he would light candles for different members in the community. The minhag symbolized the ohr haganuz, the hidden light of one's neshamah, being illuminated. Only a few people were allowed to come in when he lit the candles. Meir the shochet had his six-year-old son Baruch with him. The child impudently asked who each candle was for. Others tried to hush him, but the rebbe smiled by each question but didn't answer. Finally he asked, and who is this candle for? The rebbe said there is a city you never heard of. It's called San Francisco. This candle is predestined even for a Jew living in a far off place like San Francisco looking to find the light of his neshamah. After the war, baruch lost everything, even his faith. He came to America and married a non-Jew. For more than 50 years he lived a totally non-Jewish life. He became a successful business man. When he was 70 he was walking the streets of san Francisco, when he passed by a shul. He had an urge to see what's inside and went in. He saw many people davening, wearing white. The memories of his past came flooding in, and he had a surge of a need for kedushah. Then he saw the candles lit in the shul and remembered what the Belzer Rebbe said. He realized that tonight was Yom Kippur. "he was talking about me, he said and he broke down and cried". He joined them just in time for neila, and became a total bal teshuvah when he was 70 years old.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 115

❖ A poor tailor would wander from village to village and from city to city with his work tools in hand. Wherever he went, he would offer to mend any garments needing minor repairs. One of his trips brought him to the house of a wealthy man, and he inquired whether he possessed a garment that needed mending. The wealthy man brought the tailor into his room and opened his closet which was literally packed with different types of clothing. He requested that the tailor inspect the clothing himself and find those that needed to be repaired. The tailor examined the various articles of clothing and saw that they were all in excellent condition, not one in need of any mending whatsoever. He therefore took one of the man's most elegant outfits and undid all of its stitches! When the wealthy man saw what the tailor had done, he wanted to call the police and have him arrested. But the tailor pleaded with him and said that he would quickly repair whatever he had damaged. The wealthy man acquiesced and the tailor worked with alacrity to remedy that which he had ruined. When the tailor had finished, he presented the man with a mended garment that appeared just as it did before it had been un — stitched. Seeing that the repair had been completed, the Wealthy man removed several coins from his pocket and handed them to the tailor. The reward that the tailor received was not compensation for his labor, obviously; he did not deserve anything at all since he was the one who damaged the garment to begin with. Rather, it was charity in its simplest form, a gift to help a needy man. All of the reward which man receives for the good deeds that he performs, said the Dubno Maggid, can be categorized as reward for a mitzvah. But if an individual fasts on Yom Kippur in order to atone for

impurities of the heart, or does teshuvah then strictly speaking he is not deserving of any reward whatsoever; after all, he is the one responsible for those flaws, and now he is merely rectifying them. The reward that he inevitably receives for those fasts, however, is outright charity and kindliness from Hashem.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Yom Kippur would not begin until the close of the following day - but the journey to the town where the Baal Shem Tov lived was so long that a certain chassid decided to set out early. Just to be sure, he traveled all day and all night, and by daybreak on Yom Kippur Eve he was only a matter of miles away from his longed-for destination, Mezhibuzh. "Now that I am so near the end of my journey, thank God," he said to himself, "and my poor old horse must be exhausted after such a long stretch, this is a good time for me to take a break and recite my morning prayers. The old nag can munch some grass and take it easy meanwhile. But he was so sleepy after his prayers that he thought: "Why shouldn't I take a nap here for an hour or two? The horse can rest too, and then we'll gallop along energetically and still get to town before midday." With that he sprawled out fatigued on his wagon. He was overtaken by a deep slumber, and slept soundly until dusk. When he awoke and realized that the holy day had already set in, he was most perturbed. What a bitter disappointment! What effort and trouble had he gone to in order to make his exhausting journey so that he could spend this day of days in the presence of the Baal Shem Tov! And here he was, only a few miles out of Mezhibuzh, stranded out in the fields, alone, without as much as a minyan with which to pray. All that night and throughout the next day he wept, torn by anguish. Night came, and Yom Kippur was over. He bridled his horse and drove off quickly to Mezhibuzh, where he was greeted by the Baal Shem Tov. A smile lit up on the face of the tzaddik as he said: "Know, my good man, that with your prayer you had to raise up to the heavens the prayers of the people out in the fields, who throughout this day did not join any congregation in prayer. And that is why Divine Providence so arranged things that you should spend Yom Kippur out there in the fields."

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 98

❖ When the Brisker Rav was once in Switzerland, he was sitting on a bench next to a path, breathing the clean mountain air and looking down at the valley below, when he saw his two sons coming up the slope in his direction. An unknown man approached one of his sons — they were so far away that it was impossible to tell whether he was Jewish or not and appeared to ask them a question. They answered, the man went on his way and the two of them continued the climb up the hill. Sitting next to The Brisker Rav was a yeshivah bachur who noticed that The Brisker Rav was agitated about what had transpired between this unknown man and his sons, and was very anxious to speak to them. When they arrived, he immediately asked them about the conversation. They told him that the man was an irreligious Jew, and he wanted to know on what day Yom Kippur [which was a few weeks away] would fall. "And what did you answer him?" asked The Brisker Rav. They mentioned a certain date. "Oy!" The Brisker Rav blanched, "you were one day off! Yom Kippur is the day before. Now imagine that this Jew, who goes to synagogue only one day a year, will arrive at the synagogue on the day you told him and will find that he has missed Yom Kippur. This is a matter of pikuach nefesh for him! You must run after him and tell him the correct date of Yom Kippur..." The Brisker Rav's sons indeed ran after the man, who was already quite far away. Their father watched as they descended the mountain path. Only when he saw that they had reached him and corrected their mistake did he relax. It was a wonder: From such a distance, The Brisker Rav had understood what the man's question was, the mistake that was likely to arise and the danger to the man's life that the mistake might cause."

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 462

❖ Rabbi Meir Stern, Rosh Yeshivah of the Yeshivah Gedola of Passaic, told the following story about Rav Mordechai Schwab, who was the mashgiach in the Passaic Yeshivah. Rav Stern recalled that one Yom Kippur night, as they were about to begin Kol Nidrei, they realized that Rav Mordechai was not present. Someone went to find him and discovered Rav Schwab quietly setting up chairs in the women's section. When asked what he was doing, Rav Schwab explained that he felt

there were not enough chairs in the Yeshivah for all the women who would come to pray on Yom Kippur. Rav Mordechai believed that this act of chessed (kindness) took priority over Kol Nidrei. To him, no mitzvah, no matter how simple, was ever beneath him.

Table Talk, Edition 408 (Parshas Nitzavim Vayeilech), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Rav Nota Greenblatt was persistent in demanding that a recalcitrant husband give his wife a get, but the man wasn't budging. Finally, after numerous phone calls, the man said, "Rabbi, if you meet me at two o'clock on Erev Yom Kippur I'll agree to have you write a get." Rav Nota, who served as the baal tefillah on Yom Kippur, agreed with no hesitations. Erev Yom Kippur he arose, took a few pieces of bread, a few pieces of fish, a machzor, a volume of the Rambam which dealt with the laws of Yom Kippur, and he set out on the road to this man's location. Even after he arrived, the man refused to authorize the get. Rav Nota spent hours talking to him until he finally consented, appointing Rav Nota to write the get. Mission accomplished, Rav Nota returned to his hotel room with ten minutes left to eat a rapid seudah hamafsekes (meal prior to the onset of Yom Kippur). And there he remained, for twenty-five hours: Rav Nota, his machzor, and a Rambam. Rav Nota shared this story along with the following conclusion. “That Yom Kippur, I was mechadesh Torah (conceived novel Torah insights) on these halachos of the Rambam, the likes of which I've never done before.”

From Rav Nota, by R’ Shmuel Botnick, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Orphaned in Poland at eleven, R' Binyomin Wilhelm emigrated to New York at sixteen without a penny, working in the ship's kosher kitchen to pay his passage. Arriving on the Lower East Side at a time when keeping Shabbos meant losing one's job every week, he and a small circle of friends vowed never to compromise on a single halachah. He built a hardware business, studied Torah daily, and in 1917 moved his young family across the river to Williamsburg. Although Williamsburg had a growing Orthodox population, it had not a single yeshivah; even observant parents resignedly sent their sons to public school, viewing yeshivos as a relic of old Europe. When R' Binyomin urged community leaders to help him open a yeshivah for his four-year-old son and the neighborhood's children, one prominent resident pointed to his palm and scoffed, "When hair grows here, there will be a yeshivah in Williamsburg!" After four months of parlor meetings in R' Binyomin's home failed to gain traction, he took bold action. On the night of Hoshana Rabbah 1917, as the packed Poilisher Shteibel prepared to read Sefer Devarim, R' Binyomin ascended the bimah and pounded on the lectern: "I will not allow the reading to begin until we address the spiritual survival of our children! Sending Jewish children to public school is a fatal mistake—without a yeshivah, our children will have no Torah!" Moved by his fiery plea, Mr. Aharon Goldman wrote a check for $1,000, Mr. Wolf pledged $500, and dozens joined the founding committee. A building at Marcy Avenue and Keap Street was rented, and 45 boys were enrolled to start the following September. Days before Yom Kippur, however, the committee realized that tuition from 45 students across five grades could not cover the teachers' salaries, and everyone except R' Binyomin voted to delay the opening by a year. "How can we face the Ribbono shel Olam on Yom Kippur after abandoning the children who will be lost this year?" R' Binyomin cried, convincing the board to wait until after Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur morning, R' Binyomin davened early at home and spent the entire holy fast walking from shul to shul across Williamsburg—appealing not for money, but for parents to enroll their sons. By Ne'ilah, he had registered 45 additional boys, doubling the enrollment, and days later Yeshivah Torah Vodaath opened its doors.

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In his last years, the long, often hot day of the fast of Yom Kippur would take its toll on Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, and one Yom Kippur, While davening at Eitz Chaim, he felt particularly unwell. He Went to lie down in one of the rooms, and asked a bachur to bring him a pillow. Half an hour later, he returned to the beis medrash, and one of his close talmidim

asked him if he felt better yet. He replied that in fact, the rest had made his condition Worse. "Why did the Rosh Yeshivah not return immediately?" asked the talmid. Rav Isser Zalman looked surprised. "Voss heist, Ephraim'ke brought me the pillow. He was concerned about hurting the feelings of the bachur who had "bothered himself" to bring the pillow.

Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Even when enwrapped in the intensity of prayer, Rav Moshe Yitzchak Segal did not overlook his obligations to his fellowman. Because of the intense respect that the community had for Rav Segal, the shaliach tzibur would always wait until he finished his Shemona Esra to continue. After Neilah at Yom Kippur's end, R' Moshe Yitzchak davened Mariv alone in a room near the beis medrash. This was because this was" the only way he could ensure that the baal tefillah would not wait for him to conclude his lengthy prayers and he did not want anyone to delay breaking their fast on his account.

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Students were curious how R' Yisrael Salanter spent the hours before Yom Kippur. They saw him get a hammer and walk to shul. They thought maybe he will give himself malkos with it. He spent three hours banging all the nails in the ezras nashim benches. When they asked him why he was there, he answered that on Yom Kippur there will be many more women than usual. They may come with their finest clothes, and those clothes might get ruined because of a protruding nail head. They may ruin their whole Yom Kippur as a result.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 242

❖ If you walk into any old-fashioned shul on the morning of Yom Kippur Eve, you will see people on all sides busily collecting charity in little bowls for all kinds of worthy causes. Now the congregants of the township where the Baal Shem Tov lived - Mezhibuzh - decided that in the public interest this custom had to be abolished: it caused too much clatter and disorder. Word of this reached the Baal Shem Tov, who did not allow the proposed regulation to be enacted. He explained that one year all the forces of impurity in the universe - the kelippos - banded together on the eve of Yom Kippur in order to make an impenetrable barrier that would not allow the prayers of Israel to ascend. However, as soon as people in the World Below started rattling their little bowls in solicitation of charity, and congregants around the globe created a clatter with the coins they threw in energetically, the kelippos were torn asunder by that very noise.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 98

❖ Upon being honored with reciting the brachos at a bris, Reb Shmuel Auerbach noticed that a very strong wine was being used and asked that it be switched for a lighter type. He explained, "There's someone else who needs to drink from this, too... But what wouldn't do for an eight-day-old infant sufficed for him: One motzaei Yom Kippur, an unusually strong wine was brought forth for Havdalah. Reb Shmuel looked at the bottle with an expression of surprise, but went ahead and poured the kos anyway. Although one could see afterward that drinking such thick, syrupy wine after a long, draining fast day had done him no good, he was unwilling to make the hungry tzibbur wait for a substitute wine to be located.

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

33. Not to Work on Yom Kippur

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 151

As the Torah says, And you shall do no work (Vayikra 23:28, Parshas Emor).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

(See the detailed discussion in the section on positive commandments, §31)

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we do something wrong, we become more impure, and less disciplined. We also trigger a butterfly effect of negative consequences that radiate out of that transgression. With the help of repentance, introspection, and commitment, Yom Kippur is a time for us to become purified from the inner (taharah) and outer (kapara) consequences of our poor choices, so that we can start the year fresh and pure. The purity and new commitment that we gain on Yom Kippur helps us to become more committed to the Torah which helps us to perfect our character.

34. To Fast on Yom Kippur

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 32

As the Torah says Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement… and you shall afflict your souls (Vayikra 23:27, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- When does the fast of Yom Kippur begin?
- Can you start and end exactly when the fast begins and ends?
- Can one fast on the day before Yom Kippur as well?
- What is the consequence of eating on the day before?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

One is biblically obligated to fast continuously from evening to evening, as Scripture states: 'From evening until evening, you shall observe your Shabbos of complete rest' (Vayikra 23:32).

One is likewise obligated by Torah law to extend the sacred day by adding from the mundane (chol) onto the holy (kodesh), initiating the fast somewhat prior to sunset on the eve of Yom Kippur and concluding it only after nightfall following the departure of the holy day.

Chazal taught that whoever eats and drinks amply on the ninth of Tishrei (Erev Yom Kippur) is regarded by Scripture as though he fasted on both the ninth and the tenth.

(See also the detailed treatment of these laws in the section on negative commandments, §152)

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we do something wrong, we become more impure, and less disciplined. We also trigger a butterfly effect of negative consequences that radiate out of that transgression. With the help of repentance, introspection, and commitment, Yom Kippur is a time for us to become purified from the inner (taharah) and outer (kapara) consequences of our poor choices, so that we can start the year fresh and pure. The purity and new commitment that we gain on Yom Kippur helps us to become more committed to the Torah which helps us to perfect our character. In order to access the purifying effect of Yom Kippur, we are required to do teshuvah. Fasting helps us to teshuvah and absorb the purifying and ennobling influence of this day.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

KUZARI MA'AMER 3

On Yom Kippur, when we do teshuvah, we strive to emulate the angels who never sin, so we do that by not eating like them.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 313)

On the day we are judged, we fast to have control over our physical nature, and allow our spiritual side to dominate us [and show that we can control and discipline our nature in the future (Rav Hirsch)].

RALBAG (VAYIKRA 23:27)

Fasting gives us humility, so that we can have the humility to properly look at ourselves and see our imperfections to do teshuvah.

SFAS EMES

• The previous explanations are philosophical. This one is historical. Why is the tenth of Tishrei the day of fasting and forgiveness? Because, according to the tradition cited by the Sfas Emes, that is exactly what Klal Yisrael did during the original period of forgiveness following the sin of the Golden Calf (cheit ha-eigel). The Sfas Emes quotes Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu that during Moshe Rabbeinu's final forty days on Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael fasted, and on the final day they established a fast for night and day. Hashem accepted them, and the day became a permanent day of forgiveness for future generations. He refuses to remain defined by it. And he prepares to receive the Torah again (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5655).

• Perhaps the explanation most immediately understandable to a modern reader is based on the Torah's description of the mann: Hashem caused Bnei Yisrael to hunger and then fed them mann in order to teach that a human being does not live by bread alone, but by the utterance of Hashem's mouth (motza pi Hashem). He explains that "And He afflicted you and let you hunger" (va-ye'ancha va-yar'ivecha) itself can be understood positively: the hunger prepares a person to discover a higher kind of nourishment. Physical bread alone cannot satisfy the deepest human need. This may also explain why Yom Kippur is dominated by prayer to an extent unmatched by almost any other day. When eating stops, speech becomes central. The physical mouth becomes a spiritual mouth. Fasting on Yom Kippur quiets the physical appetite so that the living words of prayer and Torah can nourish the soul directly (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5640).

• A second explanation appears in the Sfas Emes's discussion of the prophetic verse "It shall be a unique day known to Hashem, neither day nor night" (Zechariah 14:7). Chazal apply the "one" exceptional day to Yom Kippur. The Sfas Emes develops an extraordinary idea. Every ordinary day comes to us clothed in physical form. The spiritual reality exists, but it is hidden inside the structures of the physical world. Human beings function the same way. The soul is clothed in a body. The body is not evil. It is an outer garment (levush). But a garment can sometimes hide what is beneath it. Yom Kippur temporarily removes the coat. For twenty-five hours, the Jew is invited to meet himself (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5649).

• The first explanation begins with a famous teaching of Chazal: the World to Come is a state in which there is no ordinary eating and drinking. The Sfas Emes explains that Yom Kippur allows a Jew to touch that reality while still living in this world. His language is direct: We fast "in order to approach the level of Olam Haba, where there is no eating and drinking." This requires careful explanation. The point is not just to imitate angels by pretending that we do not need food. That is the first great principle: On Yom Kippur we do not just eat less. We attempt to live from a higher source (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5653).

• In his teachings on Purim, the Sfas Emes illuminates the meaning of fasting by examining the two passages in the human throat: the windpipe (kaneh), associated with breath and voice, and the esophagus (veshet), the passage of food. He turns these into a spiritual map. He writes: The kaneh represents voice and the Tree of Life. The goal is not to remain without food forever. The goal is to return to food knowing that food is not life itself (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5654).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Why is humility the prerequisite to teshuvah?

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A girl with a chronic medical condition reached the age of twelve years and one day on Yom Kippur, having been born in the morning hours. Her physicians determined that she could safely tolerate fasting for a maximum of six hours without endangering her health. How should she allocate her six hours of fasting: should she fast during the night of Yom Kippur while she is still halachically a minor and eat in the morning, or should she eat on the night of Yom Kippur while technically exempt and reserve her six hours of fasting for the morning and afternoon when she is fully an adult (gedolah)?

Answer: Analyzing the case of a frail girl born on Yom Kippur who reaches the age of twelve years on Yom Kippur and cannot safely fast for the full twenty-six hours, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that she should begin fasting on the night of Yom Kippur like every other bat mitzvah and continue fasting as long as she is medically able, eating only later in the day when she feels weak and unable to continue. One should not tell her to eat at night in advance merely so that she might fast longer during the day, because actively breaking the fast at the outset of Yom Kippur while she currently feels healthy is improper when she may be able to fast through the night and part of the day before requiring nourishment.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 523

Chaim was very ill and was hospitalized over Yom Kippur. Initially, he wanted to try fasting. But once Yom Kippur began he started feeling weak and needed to break his fast to preserve his health. His doctors advised that he needed more fluids in his body. Chaim asked if he could have an IV inserted instead of actually drinking. The doctors said an IV would be sufficient. Chaim had the following question. In normal situations we may not drink on Yom Kippur and

in life threatening situations we must drink. If, however, the situation can be resolved without drinking that would be preferred. Chaim wondered which would be preferred in this case: To break his fast by taking a drink, or to have the Jewish attendant insert an IV needle into his arm. Inserting an IV is normally not permitted since causing a wound on Yom Tov constitutes a melachah. So in Chaim's case which method would be preferred – to drink the liquid which would be breaking his fast, or for another Jew to cause a wound on Yom Tov. What do you think?

Answer: Citing Sefer Shabbos Shabbason (Siman 96) and the Bi'ur Halachah (328:4), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if Chaim can be sustained on Yom Kippur by drinking liquids in small measured intervals (pachos mi-k'shi'ur), he should do so rather than having a doctor perform a Torah melachah (inflicting a wound/drawing blood) to insert an intravenous line. Even if he requires a full shi'ur of water immediately, drinking orally is preferable if inserting the IV entails a Torah melachah that can be avoided.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 579 (Table Talk Edition 022)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Mendel Kaplan would say, "The main thing about Yom Kippur is not to bang your chest, but to look for ways to improve yourself. Nowadays people enjoy saying a long viduy on Yom Kippur. Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzenski and Reb Elchonon were brothers-in-law, and one year Reb Elchonon asked Reb Chaim Ozer how his Yom Kippur fast had gone. Reb Chaim Ozer answered that the fast was bearable but confessing his sins was too hard for him!" That's how the al cheits are supposed to be — more painful than the fast.

Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

35. Not to Eat or Drink on Yom Kippur

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 152

As the Torah says, For whatever soul it be that shall not undergo affliction… that soul shall be cut off (Vayikra 23:29, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How much does one have to eat on Yom Kippur to violate this Torah prohibition? Is it the same amount as the prohibition to eat pig?
- If a person eats half a dates worth of bread, and half a dates worth of fruit, have they violated this?
- How much does one have to drink to violate this prohibition? Is the same amount as other amounts of liquid?
- Can different liquids combine to make up this amount?
- If the prohibition is to eat the size of a fig or a cheekful, is it permitted to eat less than that?
- Are other things besides eating prohibited on Yom Kippur?
- Are those Torah prohibitions, or Rabbinical prohibitions?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If an individual willfully eats food fit for human consumption in an amount equal to the volume of a large date (koseves ha-gassah) — which is slightly less than the volume of an egg (kebeitzah) — on Yom Kippur, he incurs the penalty of kares (spiritual excision); if done unintentionally (be-shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

All types of edible food combine together to complete this halachic minimum measure.

If a person drinks liquids fit for human consumption in an amount equal to a cheekful (melo logmav) — defined as the quantity that fills one cheek so that it bulges noticeably, which is less than a revi'is (a quarter-log) for an average adult — he incurs the penalty of kares. All potable liquids combine to complete this minimum measure.

Consuming quantities smaller than these specified measures is strictly forbidden by biblical law (chatzi shiur assur min ha-Torah), although it does not incur the statutory penalty of kares; rather, one who deliberately consumes a partial measure is liable for rabbinic lashes of disobedience (makas mardus).

By rabbinic enactment, four additional bodily pleasures and afflictions (inuyim) are strictly prohibited on Yom Kippur:

washing and bathing (rechitzah),

anointing the body with oil or lotions (sichah),

wearing leather footwear (ne'ilas ha-sandal),

and marital intimacy (tashmish ha-mitah).

If a person willfully violates any of these rabbinic prohibitions, he is liable for lashes of disobedience (makas mardus).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we do something wrong, we become more impure, and less disciplined. We also trigger a butterfly effect of negative consequences that radiate out of that transgression. With the help of repentance, introspection, and commitment, Yom Kippur is a time for us to become purified from the inner (taharah) and outer (kapara) consequences of our poor choices, so that we can start the year fresh and pure. The purity and new commitment that we gain on Yom Kippur helps us to become more committed to the Torah which helps us to perfect our character. In order to access the purifying effect of Yom Kippur, we are required to do teshuvah. Fasting helps us to teshuvah and absorb the purifying and ennobling influence of this day.

A. TO EAT ON EREV YOM KIPPUR

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-6

As it says "you shall afflict your souls on the ninth of the month (Vayikra 23:32, Parshas Emor) ".

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is an active positive commandment to eat and drink on Erev Yom Kippur, as Scripture states: 'And you shall afflict your souls on the ninth day of the month at evening' (Vayikra 23:32). Our Sages expounded (Yoma 81b): 'Does one then fast on the ninth? Surely one fasts only on the tenth! Rather, this verse teaches that whoever eats and drinks on the ninth is credited by Scripture as though he was commanded to fast on both the ninth and the tenth, and successfully fasted both days.' According to the Sefer Chareidim, this requirement is an independent biblical obligation (de'Oraisa) derived directly from the verse, and not merely a homiletical allusion (asmachta).

ROSH CHODESH: SANCTIFICATION OF THE NEW MOON

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section relate to observing Rosh Chodesh. This is a day where we resolve to renew our relationship with Hashem, just as the moon renews itself. This helps us to resolve to improve our character and come close to Hashem.

36. To Observe Rosh Chodesh

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 14-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive mitzvah to honor Rosh Chodesh with festive food and drink, enhancing the meal beyond the weekday routine in celebration of the renewal of the month.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Time flows inexorably forward. As humans, we often become absorbed in the monotonous forward march of time, and fall prey to the robotic motions of inertia. This inertia is often manifest in a lackluster commitment to coming close to Hashem and perfecting our character. Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the month, is meant to be a time of chodesh, renewal. It asks us to start the new month with a fresh commitment. It is meant to be a time to take stock of last month's mistakes and pledge to renew ourselves moving forward. This commitment to the Torah and mitzvos and to the job of improving our character helps us to become more refined and so more similar to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Just as the moon renews itself as it turns toward the light of the sun, we are to follow that example and turn towards the light of the Torah and experience a similar renewal.

RAMBAN

All of the months are numbered from the month of nisan to associate all of our months with the exodus. This helps us to see all of Jewish time as an extension of the exodus.

Recanati

We follow the moon for our months because the moon reminds us of Hashem's creation of the universe. Just like the moon is recreated every month, it reminds us of how Hashem created the entire universe.

Also the moon is seen both during the night and the day. The sun is only seen during the day. The moon is therefore symbolic of our belief in life in this world as well as in the next world.

SFAS EMES

• The foundation of Rosh Chodesh is the principle that Hashem is "Who renews in His goodness each day continuously the work of Creation." Creation is not something that happened once long ago; Divine life-force (chiyus) continuously gives the world existence. Yet when a person sees only natural order (teva), this renewal is hidden, and therefore "There is nothing new beneath the sun." The Sfas Emes explains that one who attaches himself to the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) of Hashem's life can experience continual renewal. The command "This month shall be for you" (ha-chodesh ha-zeh lachem) means that this power has been entrusted especially to Israel: a Jew can awaken renewal by faith (emunah), recognizing that everything comes continuously from Hashem. Rosh Chodesh therefore reconnects the world below the sun with the source above it, where spiritual renewal (chiddush) never stops (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5631).

• Here the Sfas Emes draws a sharp distinction between Rosh Chodesh and Shabbos. Shabbos is "a foretaste of the World to Come, permanently fixed without concealment." The higher truth is revealed because the ordinary weekday order withdraws. Rosh Chodesh is different: "Rosh Chodesh illuminates the power of renewal even within the weekdays." Work is permitted, the ordinary world remains in place, and yet a new light enters it. Rosh Chodesh therefore teaches a particularly practical avodah. Holiness is not meant to exist only when a Jew leaves mundane life behind. The inner Divine renewal can illuminate work, responsibility, physical life, and the changing conditions of the month itself (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5631).

• The Midrash says, "You have no greater renewal than this." The Sfas Emes explains that Yetzias Mitzrayim revealed that all of Creation lives only from Hashem and therefore can always be renewed. But this truth depends partly on human awareness. He therefore teaches that before every endeavor one should place this knowledge first: before performing a mitzvah, going to work, speaking, eating, or confronting a new situation, a Jew begins with the recognition that nothing is spiritually frozen. Everything can be reconnected to its Source and therefore made new. That is why the Torah could have begun with this mitzvah: it is a foundation for everything that follows (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5632).

• This is one of the Sfas Emes's boldest formulations: In the days when the month was sanctified through sighting the moon, Bnei Yisrael did not only notice an astronomical fact. They felt the hidden primordial good (tov ha-ganuz) through which Hashem continually renews Creation. Their recognition below helped draw that renewal into manifestation. Rosh Chodesh therefore teaches that spiritual perception is not passive. When Israel recognizes the Divine renewal (chiddush) within Creation, that recognition itself becomes part of how the spiritual renewal (chiddush) is revealed (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas HaChodesh 5648).

• The Sfas Emes explains that time is divided into years, months, days and hours, and each unit clothes Divine life in a different form. Bnei Yisrael were given the task of sanctifying the months to uncover the holiness hidden within time. Thus Kiddush HaChodesh does not only tell us which date it is. It reveals that a particular piece of time has an inner divine life-force (chiyus) and purpose. Every month is another vessel through which Hashem's life enters the world, and sanctifying the month reconnects that fragment of time to its spiritual source (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas HaChodesh 5635).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Why does the new month follow the moon?
- What is the purpose of Rosh Chodesh?

▪ How and why is it a Yom Tov for women?

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Shmuel had extensive knowledge of medicine and astronomy (Shabbos 128b–129a, 147a–148a; Nedarim 37b). He discovered a salve known as killurin d'Mar Shmuel for curing eye ailments (Shabbos 108b), and he once cured R' Yehudah HaNassi of an ailment (Bava Metzia 85b). He was known as Shmuel Yarchina'ah ("Shmuel the Astronomer") (Bava Metzia 85b) and he declared, "The paths of Heaven are as familiar to me as the streets of Nehardea" (Berachos 58b). He stated that he could calculate a calendar for all of the Diaspora without sighting the moon (RH 20b), and he organized a sixty-year calendar that he sent to R' Yochanan (Chullin 95b). He drew up the calendar so that it should not be necessary for the Jews in the Diaspora to observe an extra day of holidays, but it was not viewed favorably by the sages in Eretz Yisroel. When Nehardea was conquered and two of Shmuel's daughters were taken into captivity, some of the sages viewed it as a punishment for drawing up a calendar to establish when the holidays should be observed.

Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 20b & Berachos 58b

❖ Rabbi Yose recounted: An incident occurred involving Tuviah the Physician, who sighted the new moon crescent in Jerusalem together with his son and his emancipated servant. At first the Kohanim accepted him and his son as witnesses and disqualified his servant; but when they entered before the High Court (Beis Din), the judges accepted Tuviah and his emancipated servant—who as a free convert could testify alongside him—and disqualified his son, since a father and son are relatives who cannot combine for the same testimony!

Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 1:7

A. TO MAKE A BLESSING ON THE MOON

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-9

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Should one be sitting or standing when they make Kiddush levana? Why?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a mitzvah to stand while reciting the blessing over the renewal of the moon (Kiddush Levanah / Birkas HaChodesh), for Chazal taught (Sanhedrin 42a) that welcoming the radiance of the new moon is spiritually comparable to going out to greet the Shechinah (the Divine Presence).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• Why does Klal Yisrael count according to the moon, which the Torah calls the lesser luminary (ma'or ha-katan)? The Sfas Emes connects this with the Midrash concerning the moon and the appointed festivals (mo'adim), citing the pasuk "He made the moon for appointed seasons" (yarei'ach asah le-mo'adim). He explains that the moon provides a form through which human beings can attain spiritual awareness (da'as), a measure of spiritual understanding. This is also the significance of "See the moon like this, and sanctify it" (ka-zeh re'eh ve-kadeish)—

the instruction to see the new moon and sanctify the month. The moon is called the smaller luminary because it represents Divine light revealed in a measured form, allowing Klal Yisrael to receive and understand something of what would otherwise remain beyond human perception (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas HaChodesh 5661).

• How can a person experience genuine renewal when the natural world follows an established order? The Sfas Emes explains that the answer lies in the relationship between the visible world and its spiritual root (shoresh), the higher Divine source from which it receives its life. Shlomo HaMelech says, "There is nothing new beneath the sun" (Koheles 1:9). The Sfas Emes emphasizes the words "beneath the sun" (tachas ha-shemesh). The moon represents true renewal because the world can receive new spiritual life through self-nullification (bittul) to its Divine root (shoresh), which stands beyond the limitations of nature and time (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas HaChodesh 5631).

• Chazal teach that the moon was diminished and that Hashem added the stars to console it. The Sfas Emes explains that the moon and stars represent an important spiritual relationship. The moon rules during the night, when its illumination is surrounded by darkness. This corresponds to the sovereignty of Heaven (malchus Shamayim) as it exists within the natural world. Hashem is present and governs everything, but His kingship is concealed within the systems of nature. The Sfas Emes writes that the moon's nighttime rule hints at Divine kingship clothed within nature. What does it mean to assist the moon? When we look toward the renewed moon, we can remember the responsibility that its diminished light symbolizes. Klal Yisrael assists the moon by revealing the kingship of Hashem within the darkness of galus, allowing the Divine light hidden in nature to become recognized (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Shemos 5635).

• The Sfas Emes explains that a human being is a miniature universe (olam katan). Just as the physical world contains two great luminaries, the human being possesses two corresponding spiritual faculties: the mind (mo'ach) and the heart (lev). He teaches that the main struggle of avodah takes place within the heart, where a person must distinguish and clarify his conflicting desires. The heart contains the possibility of serving Hashem, but it is also the place where impulses and distractions can conceal that desire. The moon represents the purification of the heart because true spiritual renewal requires purifying the heart (birur ha-lev), uncovering the good within the heart so that a new, steadfast spirit (ruach nachon) can be received (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas HaChodesh 5661).

• The changing appearance of the moon also represents the history of Jewish kingship. In a teaching about Chanukah, the Sfas Emes explains that the first half of the lunar month, when the moon increases, and the second half, when it decreases, correspond to different spiritual movements associated with Yosef and Yehudah. He connects the diminishing half specifically with Malchus Beis David, describing the decline of the Davidic kings until the reign of Tzidkiyahu. This was a period in which the visible greatness of Jewish sovereignty was gradually diminished. The moon symbolizes Malchus Beis David because its periods of decline express the loss of visible kingship, while its return provides an image of the hoped-for restoration through Moshiach ben David (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5656).

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

▪ Why do we sanctify the moon?

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Moshe Leib Feldman couldn't have children. He was very careful about Kiddush levana. He heard that near beis lechem the moon is shining. He went near Kever Rachel, did it and danced under the moon. He then davened at Kever Rachel. The people there davened as well. His wife had twin girls nine months later on rachel's yahrtzeit the 11 of cheshvan.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 36

B. TO SAY HALLEL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to recite the complete Hallel (Hallel ha-Gomer) on all eight days of Chanukah, as well as on the first day of Pesach (and the first two days in the Diaspora), whereas an abbreviated Hallel (Chatzi Hallel) is recited on the remaining six days of Pesach. Reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, by contrast, was instituted as a sacred communal custom (minhag) rather than a formal rabbinic obligation.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes explains the word praise (Hallel) through the expression "when His lamp shone above my head" (be-hilo nero). Bnei Yisrael are sent through places of darkness in order to raise the sparks of holiness (nitzotzei kedushah) hidden there. During the distress (tzarah), that inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) cannot be clearly seen. When the geulah arrives, however, what had been concealed begins to shine. He therefore writes: Hallel is not only a verbal thank-you for escaping danger. It is the human response to a new spiritual light (or) that has appeared precisely where there had been darkness. The former darkness makes the light recognizable (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5647).

• Chazal read "Give praise, O servants of Hashem" (Hallelu avdei Hashem) as "servants of Hashem, and not slaves of Pharaoh." The Sfas Emes makes this the center of Hallel. Freedom is not the removal of all authority. A Jew is freed from Pharaoh and from lower masters so that he can belong completely to Hashem. This is why true avdus Hashem produces song. Ordinary slavery is carried as a yoke and a burden (ol u-masa), but the servant of Hashem becomes filled with "song and gladness" (shir ve-chedvah) through the very service he accepts. Hallel therefore celebrates not only that the old master disappeared, but that the Jew has recovered the freedom to serve the proper Master. The joy of Hallel testifies that sovereignty of Heaven (malchus Shamayim) has been accepted willingly (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5660).

• Galus is not only suffering. It is a condition in which earthly kingdoms (malchiyos) appear to possess independent power. The Sfas Emes explains that the rule of the nations becomes possible when the sovereignty of Heaven (malchus Shamayim) within Israel is concealed. A geulah therefore clarifies something larger than political freedom: the kingdom that appeared autonomous was itself operating only through the inner will (ratzon) of Hashem. When Israel recognizes this, the redemption becomes a renewed acceptance of the yoke of

Heaven's sovereignty (kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim). Hallel gives voice to that clarification. The praise is not focused primarily upon Jewish strength or victory; it turns the entire event back toward the truth that "the kingship belongs to Hashem" (la-Hashem ha-meluchah) (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5632).

• A miracle can occur and still fail to become permanently integrated into the people who experienced it. The Sfas Emes therefore understands the response of Hallel and Hodaah as part of the continuation of the miracle (nes) itself. Regarding Chanukah he writes: Their recognition drew the illumination of the miracle forward into later generations. He then applies the principle to every individual: when a person receives a salvation (yeshuah), Hallel creates the vessel through which a momentary revelation (gilui) becomes an enduring spiritual possession (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5632).

• One of the Sfas Emes's most remarkable explanations begins with the expression "completing the full Hallel" (gomrin es ha-Hallel). Why do our Sages describe reciting the full Hallel as "completing the Hallel" (gomrin es ha-Hallel)? He explains that the heavenly spiritual light (or) begins the praise, but Creation requires an answer from below. The miracle descends from above; the Jewish mouth completes the movement by sending recognition upward. In this sense Hallel expresses the partnership between heaven and earth (shamayim va-aretz). What begins as Divine revelation (gilui) becomes complete only when human beings recognize it and give it voice (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5659).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Daniel Glatstein told over the following beautiful story. The Yom Tov of Chanukah differs from Purim. On Purim, we celebrate physically with mishteh v'simchah (feasting and happiness). On Chanukah, we celebrate lehodos u'lehalel, by thanking Hashem. There was a man named Asher who had several daughters over the age of twenty-eight whom he was struggling to marry off. The situation occupied much of his time and was wearing him down. Asher had a chavrusa whose daughter became engaged rather quickly. The chavrusa needed to buy an apartment in Yerushalayim, which can be extremely expensive, and he required an arev (cosigner). Asher graciously agreed to be the guarantor. However, when the time came, the chavrusa could not meet his financial responsibilities and failed to make the monthly payments. The burden fell on Asher, who certainly could not pay. Eventually, the bank repossessed Asher's home. He was left with unmarried daughters getting older, and to add insult to injury, he had lost his house. He was broken and did not know what to do. A friend advised him, "Why don't you go speak to the Gerrer Rebbe, the Beis Yisrael?" Asher felt he had nothing to lose, so he went to the Gerrer Rebbe. The Rebbe asked, "Asher, do you daven?" Asher replied, "Rebbe, what do you think I do? That is what I do all day! I daven to Hashem: 'Please Hashem, help me marry off my daughters! Help me get out of financial debt!'" The Gerrer Rebbe asked again, "But do you daven?" "Rebbe, I just told you that I don't stop davening! All throughout the day, all I do is daven to Hashem." "Asher, do you daven?" Asher finally asked, "Rebbe, am I missing something?" The Rebbe explained, "Davening is not asking Hashem for what you need. Davening is thanking Hashem for what you have. Do you thank Hashem for all the blessings He has given you?" Conversation over. Asher was confused. He davens, and he asks Hashem... but does he thank Hashem? Is davening really about thanking Hashem? What did he even have to be thankful for? He recounted this to a friend, who said, "The Rebbe makes a very good point. You have clothing. You are alive. Your heart is beating. Your lungs are operating. You can see, hear, talk, and think. Your memory is functioning. For your body to work, trillions of processes must go right, and they always do. Do you ever stop and thank Hashem for these things?" Asher realized he had much more to thank Hashem for than he had initially thought. He made a list and recognized that the things the Ribbono Shel Olam was giving him infinitely outweighed what he was missing. The

Rebbe had taught Asher a secret: Tefilah (prayer) should be 60% thanking and 40% asking. That was the ratio the Beis Yisrael gave to Asher. From Chanukah, the Yom Tov of thanksgiving, let us take this lesson for the whole year. Our main focus should be thanking Hashem for what we have, not asking for what we lack.

Table Talk, Edition 471, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

RABBINICAL FAST DAYS: COMMEMORATION & MOURNING

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section relate to observing the rabbinical fast days. These are all days of introspection in which we attempt to improve our character and correct the mistakes that were at the root of our historical tragedies.

37. To Fast on the Five Rabbinical Fast Days

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred obligation established by the Prophets (divrei kabbalah) to fast on four designated days of the year in commemoration of the national tragedies and calamities surrounding the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, as Scripture states: 'Thus says Hashem of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month shall become times of joy and gladness for the House of Judah' (Zechariah 8:19). These fasts correspond to the Seventeenth of Tammuz (the fourth month), Tisha B'Av (the fifth month), Tzom Gedaliah on the Third of Tishrei (the seventh month), and Asarah B'Teves on the Tenth of Teves (the tenth month). The core purpose of these communal fasts is not mere physical deprivation, but to awaken our hearts and open the pathways of sincere repentance (teshuvah) by reflecting upon the ancestral misdeeds that brought about these devastations.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of the fast days, were originally days of tragedy (or potential tragedy, in the case of the Fast of Esther). They have become days set aside for teshuvah and introspection, to commemorate the mistakes that were at the origin of the tragedies, and to think how those same mistakes can be corrected in our own lives. This introspection helps to perfect our character to help us resemble Hashem.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Mark was a dentist and he only had one hour on the holiday of purim to hear the Megillah. As he was going to the synagogue to hear the Megillah, he gets a phone call that there was an emergency, a person who has extreme pain from a tooth infection and he wants to be able to go to the dentists for him to take away the pain. The question that Mark had was, would that mitzvah to help this person, would that override his mitzvah to hear the Megillah on purim? Perhaps simply taking away pain of another person who isn't in danger would not override his mitzvah, his commandments to hear, the Megillah. What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the dentist should immediately treat the patient suffering severe, incapacitating dental pain, even though doing so will cause the dentist to miss hearing the Megillah during his only free hour. Relieving a fellow Jew from acute physical suffering is a biblical mitzvah ('ve-ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha' and hashavas aveidah d'gufo, Kiddushin 8b and Me'iri), which overrides the rabbinic obligation of Megillah under the rule of ha-osek b'mitzvah patur min ha-mitzvah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 51

If a person mistakenly recited a blessing over food two minutes before a public fast concluded, may he taste a tiny morsel to avoid a blessing in vain (brachah l'vatalah), or must he refrain and wait until the fast ends?

Answer: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 186) ruled that he should wait quietly without diverting his attention (b'lo hesech hada'as) until the fast concludes two minutes later and then eat immediately, and the blessing he recited remains valid.

— Source: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 186

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once the world was in desperate need of rain. Rabbi Eliezer stepped before the Ark, decreed fasts, and recited twenty-four blessings, yet no rain fell. Then Rabbi Akiva stepped before the Ark, stood in prayer, and said: 'He causes the wind to blow'—and a wind immediately blew! He said: 'And He causes the rain to fall'—and rain immediately poured down! Seeing the people whispering, the Zohar (echoing the Heavenly Voice) explained with a parable: Not because Rabbi Akiva is greater in Torah than his teacher Rabbi Eliezer, but because Rabbi Eliezer is exacting while Rabbi Akiva is forbearing and overlooks slights against himself—like a King who had two friends, one who demanded everything immediately with insistence and one who asked gently with patience, and the King delighted to fulfill the gentle friend's request at once!

Zohar II, 19b (Parshas Shemos; cf. Taanis 25b)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Pam related an interesting incident which occurred during one hospital stay some years ago. Since he had turned bar mitzvah, he had never missed fasting on any of the mandated public fasts. One of the fasts fell during that hospital stay. Rav Pam felt strong enough to fast but was concerned that his doctor would not permit this. The night before the fast, a nurse connected him to intravenous and attached a note to his bed which read, "This patient is not to receive any food or drink." She did not explain the reason for this and Rav Pam asked no questions. The following evening, after the fast had ended, Rav Pam's doctor entered the room and, upon noticing the sign, took it down and asked, "I gave no such orders! Who said you can't have food?" The mystery was never solved, but Rav Pam succeeded in fasting as he had desired.

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Similarly, seared upon the heart of one of Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus's sons was the time when he returned home from yeshivah on erev Tishah B'Av and met his father on his way out the door to shul. "I was frightened; Tatty's face was wreathed in grief as if he'd just lost an immediate family member," he recounts. He wept bitterly during the recitation of Kinnos, occasionally motioning to one of his sons to join him so he could explain to him a passage composed by one of the Rishonim. He once remarked, "At a wedding, you can't always tell from the dancing who's an immediate family member;

but l'havdil, at a funeral, the distinction is clear: The ones crying hardest are the ones who suffered the deepest loss. The same is true of our Churban and galus; those who weep bitterly over the destruction and two-thousand-year exile are the ones who are related."

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

❖ On one hot shiva assar be Tammuz fast day, a man knocked on Reb Yechezkel Levenstein's door to solicit charity for his daughter's wedding. Reb Yechezkel gave him his usual donation and later that evening found the same man in the synagogue. Reb Yechezkel invited him to break the fast at his house, which was close by, and save walking back in the heat on an empty stomach. The offer was declined with the confession: "I didn't fast." When Reb Yechezkel heard this, he contributed even more money, saying, "Now I see that you are truly an honest man."

Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

PURIM: REVERSAL OF DESTINY & JOY

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to observing the holiday of Purim. This is a day in which we remind ourselves of Hashem's constant protection and love for the Jewish people, that can even be manifest in the ostensibly mundane occurrences of life.

38. To Celebrate Purim

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

We have five mitzvos that are connected to Purim. They are Megillah, Matanos La'evyonim, Mishloach Manos, Seudah, Taanis Esther.

Megillah – The Megillah teaches us to have Bitachon. Although Hashem's presence is hidden, he is behind the scenes taking care of us and every single thing that happens in the Purim story and in our lives were leading to a good result.

Matanos La'evyonim - One of the main lessons of Purim is The Power Of Prayer. The prayer of the Jewish people averted the terrible decree. We give tzedakah to anyone who asks, and in that merit Hashem should answer the prayers of anyone who asks.

Mishloach Manos – One of the lessons of the Purim story was The Dangers of Disunity. Haman saw that we were disunified and that gave him an opportunity to destroy us. He told Achashverosh that we are a people that are Mefuzar and Mefurad. To correct that, we make sure to strengthen our unity as a people by giving gifts to each other.

Seudah – Another major lesson of Purim is The Eternity of The Jewish People. The Persians and Amalek tried to kill us as a people. We celebrate our life by making a physical and material meal.

Taanis Esther – Another lesson of Purim is the danger of Assimilation. The Jewish people were guilty of two primary sins. Worshiping the idol of Nevucadnetzar and participating in the immoral feast of Achashveirosh. These were sins of assimilation. The 13th of Adar was a day that the Jewish people were subject to destruction because of these sins. After the miraculous survival. The day of the 13 of Adar remained as a day to do teshuvah about our own sins of assimilation.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

On Purim, Hashem saved Yisrael physically in galus and Klal Yisrael were mekabel the Torah once more forever. We access the same hashpa now as well.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira celebrated the Purim feast together. After becoming intoxicated, Rabbah rose and struck down Rabbi Zeira; the next morning, Rabbah prayed for Heavenly mercy and revived him. The following year, Rabbah sent word to Rabbi Zeira: 'Let the Master come and celebrate the Purim feast together with me!' Rabbi Zeira replied: 'A miracle does not happen every single hour!'

Megillah 7b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Chaim Epstein (1936 - 2015) a close student of Rav Aharon Kotler, was the esteemed Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Zichron Meilech in Brooklyn, a position he held for over 40 years. Rabbi Zevy Golombeck told the following beautiful story: I was speaking to the driver of the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Chaim Epstein zt"l, and he shared something incredible. He was once driving the Rosh Yeshivah on the highway. There were three lanes, and they were in the left lane. Rav Chaim Epstein looked out of his window and saw that in the two lanes next to them, two cars had crashed. One of the cars in the middle lane spun out of control and was coming full force -- straight toward Rav Chaim Epstein's passenger-side door. In that split second, spontaneously, Rav Chaim Epstein said, "Ein od milvado! Ein od milvado!" The driver said that the car, which had been spinning out of control straight toward them, suddenly changed direction and spun the other way. That is the koach of relying on Hashem. When we put our emunah and bitachon in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when we truly believe that He alone runs the world, nothing and no one can harm us. This is one of the main lessons of Purim.

Table Talk, Edition 432 (Parshas Ki Tisa), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ One leil Purim, one of Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus's sons accompanied him home from the tisch after hours spent singing, dancing, drinking, arousing the hearts of his beloved kehillah to love and fear Hashem, and finding a good word and berachah for everyone who appealed to him. Walking tiredly and slightly unsteadily up the path, Rav Shimshon suddenly burst out joyfully with a sentence that would remain with his son forever. "What's most important is that I didn't hurt anyone! We went through so much tonight, and no one was insulted!"

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

❖ One of Rav Matisyahu Salomon's granddaughters was in the twelfth grade when the class was preparing a really unique Purim shtick. Somehow the class had managed to switch buses with a twelfth-grade class in a different school. The plan was for each of the two twelfth-grade classes to be bused to the wrong school. It seems that this granddaughter's school caught wind that something was in the air, and the day before the shtick was to take place, the principal announced, "This year there will be no Purim shtick, and those who do anything will be punished." The twelfth graders decided to ignore the announcement and carry on with their plans. Rav Mattisyahu's granddaughter called her grandfather to ask him what to do. And what a surprise she got! "Unless a minimum of ten girls will be staying behind," he told her, "you should not separate yourself from the tzibbur..."

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Aryeh Levine was renowned for feeling the pain of every Jew. One year, on the day before Purim, Shulamith Katznelson came to visit him. Half in jest, half in earnest, he told her, shaking his head, "This day Purim is harder for me than Tish'a b'Av. On Tish'a B'av we can weep easily, without any effort. How can you possibly not on a day that has caused so much sadness for our people? On Purim, though, we have a duty to be happy, and this business of happiness is no easy matter. How great are the needs of our people, how endless is their suffering."

A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim

❖ One Purim, a local woman came into the apartment and approached the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Dovid Feinstein. She was putting her apartment up for sale and wanted a berachah that it go easily. The Rosh Yeshivah could not hear her clearly in the crowded room, and wished her that she have a healthy child. She protested, explaining that she was over fifty years old and asking for a berachah regarding the sale of her apartment. The Rosh Yeshivah thought she wanted a second berachah, so he gave her another berachah — and she had a child that year and the following year.

From Reb Dovid, by R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO HAVE A SEUDAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to partake of a festive celebratory meal (Seudas Purim) on Purim day, rejoicing with food, wine, and praise in thanksgiving for the miraculous salvation of Klal Yisroel.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

On Purim we remember that Hashem protects the Jewish people during our exile, and he is taking care of us and guiding world events in a hidden way. This recognition brings us a tremendous joy of closeness to Hashem. That closeness inspires us to keep the Torah which helps to perfect our character.

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- How are we to understand Antisemitism? What is its cause?
- Discuss the idea of Netzach Yisrael, how the Jewish people will never be destroyed
- Discuss the idea of how Purim teaches us to see Hashem hidden in nature and in historical events

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes contrasts Purim with a festival whose miracles are visibly above ordinary natural processes. Rather than regard this concealment as spiritually inferior, he explains its advantage: through such events, holiness can be drawn down into the ordinary natural order itself. The enemy's lot (Pur), his lottery, is overturned; even the framework of seemingly accidental circumstances becomes an instrument of salvation. This is why the day is celebrated through a feast and joy. Food and drink belong to the concrete world of embodied existence, where Divine life is easily forgotten. The full original maamar also explains the possibility of Divine help reaching the world of apparent astrological fortune (mazal), even though Klal Yisrael transcend mere dependence on it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5644).

• On the day of their salvation, the mitzvah is to delight the body with a feast. What does bodily pleasure have to do with spiritual repair? The Sfas Emes finds the answer in the Sages' words: in the days of Achashverosh Israel re-accepted the Torah, out of love for the miracle (me-ahavas ha-nes). The difficulty is only sharpened: kabbalas haTorah is a matter of the soul — why should its re-acceptance be expressed through the mouth's pleasure? His

answer is that what was damaged was not "we will hear and understand" (nishma) but "we will do" (na'aseh) — the doing itself. This is the sweetness of the taam: the same mouth that does the mitzvah is the mouth that the mitzvah rectifies — the faculty of action heals itself from within, by joy (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5639).

• The Megillah closes with the phrase "the matters of the fastings and their outcries" (divrei ha-tzomos ve-za'akasam), and the Sfas Emes sets down the astonishing claim of the Sages: all of Israel's strengthening over Amalek came through the fast. The question begs itself: what does a fast contribute to a war? The Zoharic anatomy given here supplies the answer. In the throat there are two channels: the windpipe (kaneh)—the channel of the voice—and the esophagus (veshet)—the channel of food. The windpipe (kaneh) is like olam haba, in which there is no eating and drinking, and it is the aspect of Yaakov, whose whole strength is in the voice. The fast day before Purim is thus the arming of Yaakov's weapon — the silencing of the esophagus (veshet) so that the voice of Yaakov (kol Yaakov) may conquer (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5654).

• Reflecting on the joy of the Purim feast, the Sfas Emes explains that the struggle against Amalek extends through many levels of spiritual experience, where a mixture of good and evil still leaves a possibility for harmful forces to attach themselves. The fiftieth level, however, represents a root of unity that is entirely good. Above the branching world of differentiated good and evil, the power of Amalek has no place to hold. Rather than endorsing mindless excess, the Sfas Emes illuminates the true spiritual aspiration of the Purim feast: to recover an inner unity that is higher than the realm in which Amalek's opposition operates (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5640).

• The Sfas Emes explains why the days were established for festive joy (mishteh ve-simchah) by teaching that in these days of Purim a special rectification becomes possible for the physical body. He derives a surprising route to this repair from the tradition of silence associated with Rochel, Binyamin, and Esther, all of whom display discipline over what they reveal in speech. He cites the Mishnah that silence is beneficial for the body and relates this to the Temple's practice of drawing wine without disruptive noise. Wine can represent a form of wisdom that becomes available when physical impulses are restrained and no longer overpower the higher soul (neshamah). Through inner discipline and humility, the physical body itself becomes a pure vessel receptive to the light of the higher soul (neshamah) (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5648).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Zev was a businessman who was very wealthy. He gave large amounts of money to tzedakah. Every year he would invite his three neighbors and their family to his Purim seudah. He would serve the most expensive kosher wine available. He did this as a means of beautifying the mitzvah. Zev was renowned for having these wines. Sadly, one year Zev's business dried up. He was struggling financially but was embarrassed to let any of his friends or neighbors know. Purim time came and Zev felt obligated to Invite his neighbors once again. When it came time to buy the wine, he blanched. He could no longer afford such expensive wine. But if he used regular or cheap wine, it would be obvious to his neighbors that something was wrong. In desperation Zev went to the owner of an elegant kosher restaurant. He asked the restaurateur if he could give him the empty bottles of expensive wine that they saved, for a Purim project. Zev washed out the bottles, bought cheap wine, and poured the wine into the expensive bottles. Zev figured that on Purim his neighbors wouldn't realize that the wine tasted different, as long as it was poured from the expensive bottle. The seudah went well. The guests loved the wine. But as his neighbor was complimenting Zev for the delicious wine, Zev was struck with an anxiety-producing thought. Was it mutar to serve them this wine, giving them the impression that

it was expensive, when it was not? Was that considered genevas da'as, tricking others? Or would that perhaps be permitted, to avoid embarrassment? What do you think? Was Zev permitted to serve his guests cheap wine in an expensive bottle?

Answer: Regarding the question of the cheap wine in the expensive bottles, Rav Zilberstein answered as follows. If he would want to impress someone by presenting them wine and give the impression that it was a very expensive bottle, when it was really inexpensive wine that would be forbidden as gneivas daas. This is because he makes the receiver more grateful and beholden to him than he would normally be. However in this case the host's intent is not to make the guests be beholden to him. Rather his intent is to prevent himself from being embarrassed. It is therefore permitted.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 118 (Ki Tisa)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ At a Purim banquet held in the Satmar Rebbe's home, a talented and somewhat; inebriated merrymaker climbed onto the table and began mimicking the Rebbe's prayers and addresses. He faithfully reproduced the Rebbe's chant, movements and mannerisms, including the tears and sighs that he often emitted when he was gripped by excitement and holy fervor. The impersonation was masterful and the excited crowd thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Suddenly, though, the Rebbe burst into stormy tears and said, "When I see how one can pray and discourse in such precise imitation of the way I do, I begin to wonder whether I myself am not sincere and sometimes merely imitating myself..."

In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ A few weeks ago we shared a story about the Machlis Family on Shabbos. Here is another beautiful anecdote about their hospitality on Purim. A guest recalled the following beautiful vignette. "When I graduated high school in 1994, I went to Israel for a year. I was, searching; "finding myself". On Purim, I came to the Machlis home for the seudah. Mrs. Machlis, with a broad smile, was busy preparing a huge meal for scores of guests. Her happiness and excitement was absolutely contagious. Mrs. Machlis called out to Rabbi Machlis that she needed a case of wine from the car. I volunteered to get it. I walked in the door with a case of wine, and the unthinkable happened. I dropped the whole case of wine! There was glass and wine all over the apartment floor! The wine was needed for all of the guests, and wine was the highlight of the seudah! I was devastated and embarrassed. But all of a sudden, I heard screams coming from Rabbi and Mrs. Machlis. "Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!" In a flash, Rabbi Machlis grabbed a circle of men and began dancing with me and around the broken glass, singing. They danced around the glass like one would do at Simchas Torah." "Siman Tov UMazel Tov!" "Siman Tov UMazel Tov!" What love and sensitivity!

From Emunah With Love and Chicken Soup, By Sara Yocheved Rigler, Published by Shaar Press

B. TO HEAR THE MEGILLAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly and the Prophets to read and hear Megillas Esther on Purim, both at night and again during the day, to publicize Hashem's miraculous redemption (pirsumei nisa).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• Citing his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, in a 5646 Purim discourse, the Sfas Emes asks why Megillas Esther is uniquely designated in the verse as both an iggeres (an open letter or epistle) and a sefer (a permanently bound scroll), and how this illuminates Chazal's teaching on "For the Jews there was light—this refers to the Torah." While the masculine noun or refers to the Written Torah (sefer), the feminine form orah denotes the Oral Torah (Torah Sheba'al Peh) planted within the souls of Israel by the Men of the Great Assembly at the close of prophecy. Hearing the Megillah—which simultaneously bears the halachic character of a written sefer and an oral iggeres—serves as the vital spiritual connector (memutza v'chibur) that unites the Written Torah with the living Oral Torah in every generation (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5646).

• The Sfas Emes poses an exact textual and liturgical difficulty. He answers by distinguishing the miracle in its spiritual source from the time when people below can receive its illumination. Divine salvations are not confined to the original moment in the way physical events are. Their light remains present above ordinary time, but only particular days are prepared to make it accessible within time. This makes the verse "and these days are remembered and reenacted" (ve-ha-yamim ha-eileh nizkarim ve-na'asim) the key. His conclusion regarding walled cities and Yerushalayim follows from Purim's role as preparation for the second Beis HaMikdash. That setting reinforces the seriousness of the reading: it is far more than a dramatic telling but a ritual channel for the original spiritual accomplishment (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5647).

• The Sfas Emes develops the relationship between remembered (nizkarim) and reenacted (na'asim), citing Chazal's comparison of remembrance to actual performance. He distinguishes two kinds of knowing. A person can retain factual information about a miracle without allowing the information to touch the fundamental orientation of his life. Such knowledge can be forgotten or set aside. By contrast, something truly known in the depths of the soul becomes instinctive, just as a person who firmly recognizes the danger of death naturally avoids it without needing to decide the matter anew each time. Hearing the Megillah engraves the miracle so deeply into the heart that faith in Hashem's hidden providence becomes second nature (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5631).

• The Sfas Emes explains "and these days are remembered and reenacted" (ve-ha-yamim ha-eileh nizkarim ve-na'asim) by explicitly referring to the miracles that Klal Yisrael remembers in the reading of the Megillah (bi-keri'as ha-Megillah). To the degree that they remember, the ancient salvation becomes spiritually active again. But he adds a structured account of how that renewed light is received. Haman's hostility belongs to three dimensions of creation: physical space (olam), the cycle of time (shanah), and living souls (nefesh). Because the salvation of Purim redeemed Israel across all three dimensions—in Shushan, in the month of Adar, and within the souls of Mordechai and Esther—hearing the Megillah reawakens that protective light across space, time, and soul (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5657).

• The Sfas Emes considers a seeming contradiction in Chazal's treatment of Purim. Why can the reading substitute for Hallel if the same miracle is not of the kind ordinarily celebrated with Hallel? He answers by distinguishing the opening of higher spiritual gateways from the revelation of Divine glory inside the ordinary world. At other festivals, Hallel belongs to an experience in which higher, inner gates open and the person praises Hashem from that elevated perspective. The Purim miracle instead disclosed holiness (kedushah) through the conditions of an earthly exile. Haman tried to prevent the Jewish people from serving as witnesses to Hashem's

> presence in the world, and his downfall caused that presence to become visible precisely where it had seemed most obscured. The remainder of the maamar explores the different spiritual paths represented by the downfall of the wicked and the elevation of the righteous. Those ideas add context but should not obscure the central conclusion: Megillah reading gives voice to a revelation of Divine glory that entered the ordinary, exilic world (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5649).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A poverty-stricken villager once came to the nearby town of Koznitz on Purim in order to hear the Megillah read in the synagogue. The Scroll was read by none less than Reb Yisrael, the celebrated Maggid of Koznitz, and as the simple fellow listened to the story he beamed with joy. When the service was over the Maggid approached him and said: "Aren't you from the village over there, that is part of my region? So why didn't you bring me Mishloach Manos?" The poor fellow did not know what to answer. At home there was not even enough bread for his half dozen toddlers, so where was he to find the wherewithal for buying Mishloach Manos for the Maggid? Reb Yisrael continued: "Look, today is Purim! Come along with me and have a little sip of something!" With the help of the little sip and the refreshments that he was given in the home of the Maggid, together with the joy he felt at being privileged to be there in the company of the Maggid's disciples, he became daring of spirit. He went from there straight to the house of a wealthy wine merchant, where he knocked on the door and told the householder: "A happy Purim to you, sir! Would you be so good as to give me a bottle of choice wine on credit? Without a doubt I will pay you, but just in case I don't - isn't is Purim today?" The merchant obliged; so off strode our villager to a nearby shop, where he said: "A very happy Purim, my friend! Two or three shiny apples, if you don't mind. It goes without saying that I will pay. But if I don't, - why, it's Purim today!" Off he went, buoyant and carefree, to the Maggid. "Rebbe, I've brought you Mishloach Manos!" he said, with the confidence of a man who knows the taste of success. "Well done," said the Maggid. "And remember to bring Mishloach Manos every Purim!" On his way out, cold reality hit him hard. "My poor family are famished, and haven't the slightest inkling of today's Purim joy," he said to himself. "I'll have to do something about it!" So he headed straight for the vendor of vodka, where he again used his tried and tested formula, and then used it once more for a hot loaf of bread and yet again for a few fat herrings. With these luxuries under his arm he ran all the way home, kicked the door open, and announced as if he were the town crier: "It's Purim today! Purim today!" His wife and children were hardly used to seeing him in such spirits. Perhaps his grinding worries had put him out of his mind, God forbid? But he put their minds at ease by laying out the royal spread on their rickety table, and saying: "Eat, drink, and be merry, because it's Purim today!" The ragged family ate their fill, and then, as if animated by a breath of life, they sprang up from their places and danced around their cottage kitchen, singing lustily: "Today is Purim! It's Purim today!" A thud on the door soured their idyll. "Don't open!" whispered the villager to his wife. "It's most probably one of those gentile peasants who has come to disturb our Purim joy." The gentile knocked repeatedly. "Don't worry," said the villager's wife. "I think it's only old Ivan who always comes around wanting to sell potatoes." Opening the door, she was shocked to see the state old Ivan was in - beaten and bruised, and bleeding on all sides. Feeling sorry for him, they gently washed and dressed his wounds, and raised his spirits by letting him share their ration of bread and vodka. "You folk saved my life," he muttered. "There was only a hairsbreadth between me and death." He went on to tell them how his only son had beaten him up and thrown him out of his own house. Had they not come to his help, he would surely have died of his wounds out there in the snow. "Now listen here," he said after he had rested a while. "Since my only son has proved to be a cruel murderer, and you poor folk had pity on me, come along with me to the forest and I will show you a big treasure. It's the money I saved, and was going to give my son before I die. Now it's yours - a gift from me!" The villager followed the limping gentile into the forest, where he was shown a certain tree under which, he said, the money was hidden. A few days later the gentile died as a

result of his wounds. The villager later went out to the spot he was shown, dug near the tree - and was suddenly a rich man. And every Purim after that he would call on the Maggid, and give him Mishloach Manos with an open hand and a glad heart.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 291

❖ Rabbi Moshe Juravel was known throughout the Baltimore community as the one to contact if you need a Megillah reading for one person or for a tzibur. He was committed that no Jew should be left behind. He trained many people to lain and he and his mitzvah men made sure that every person heard the Megillah by night and by day. Mr. Morris Baronoff had suffered three debilitating strokes from which he became uncommunicative for his five final years of life. Although the doctors encouraged his wife to place him in a nursing home, Mrs. Baronoff refused because she was convinced that her husband was still comprehending his environment. For five years Mrs. Baronoff asked Rabbi Juravel to blow shofar for him on Rosh Hashanah and read the Megillah for him on Purim and of course he did. One year when Mrs. Baronoff called before Purim, R' Moshe decided that it would be best if he went himself to lain rather than sending one of his mitzvah men. He knew that Mrs. Baronoff appreciated his personal touch. As R' Moshe walked in that morning with Megillah in hand, he approached Mr. Baronoff who was propped up in bed and in a loud cheerful voice wished him a freilichin Purim. Mr. Baronoff returned his greeting with a blank empty stare. Pretending that he was speaking to someone who was actually aware of what he was saying, R' Moshe continued "I am now going to read the Megillah for you. First I will recite the brachos for the reading." As he began reading the Megillah R' Moshe thought to himself, "Maybe the others were right; Mr. Baronoff does not even realize that I am here reading the Megillah, however he continued reading. When he reached the first mention of Haman R' Moshe thought he heard a tapping sound. He looked up and saw Mr. Baronoff's right index finger gently tapping on the table in a light rhythmic beat! "No!" thought R' Moshe "Surely this is a coincidence". He continued reading and as he soon reached the next Haman he once again saw Mr. Baronoff tapping his finger. He could not believe his eyes, Mrs. Baronoff was right! He was totally aware of his surroundings. R' Moshe stopped for a moment and with a tear in his eye went on reading the rest of the Megillah.

Taken from "For Goodness Sake" with permission from Rabbi Boruch Brull

❖ A young woman from Lakewood waiting for her zivug was given a berachah that she would find him before Purim. She waited eagerly, but there were no prospects. On Taanis Esther, she drove to the Lower East Side to update the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Dovid Feinstein, that nothing had changed. She was still single, just as she had been months earlier when he had given her the berachah. Reb Dovid did not seem too concerned. "I said before Purim and it's not Purim yet," he replied. After the meeting concluded, she drove back to Lakewood. Her brother, who had not been expecting her back that quickly, had invited some friends to the house, preparing for Purim that night. The boys ended up staying over to break the fast after reading the Megillah, and the hostess thought that one of the bachurim would be a good match for her daughter. The shidduch was suggested, and eventually, they were engaged. She had found her match before Purim, as the Rosh Yeshivah had said.

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

C. TO GIVE MISHLOACH MANOS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 142,1

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How many manos do you have to send to how many people?
- Should you send more than that?

- What should you spend more money on, nice mishloach manos baskets, or giving charity? Which is more important?
- Why?
- Why is it so important to bring joy to the misfortunate?

KITZUR SHULCHAN ARUCH

Every person is obliged to send to at least one other person two gifts as it is written, '...sending portions, each person to his friend' meaning (at least) two gifts to one (person). All who send many gifts to their friends are to be praised. In any case, it is better to increase the gifts to the poor instead of making a bigger festive meal or sending gifts to friends, for there is no greater and glorious joy before the Holy One, blessed be He, than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, and the widows. One who gladdens the hearts of these unfortunates resembles the Divine Presence as it is said "...to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the depressed..."?

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes compares two major Jewish gatherings. At Sinai the community assembled because Hashem commanded, "Gather the people to Me, and I shall let them hear My words" (Hak'heil li es ha-am ve-ashmi'eim es devarai). In the Purim story, however, the Jews gathered in response to Esther's call, and the Sfas Emes stresses that they did so of their own accord (me-atzmam). He reads "and the Jews accepted" (ve-kibeil ha-Yehudim) in its singular form as evidence that individuals had become one collective. Voluntary unity overcame the falsehood of Amalek and enabled a renewed acceptance of Torah; sending portions to one another does far more than commemorate an ancient custom—it expresses an enduring condition for Torah to be received by Klal Yisrael as a unified people (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5661).

• Haman's charge—"there is one nation scattered and dispersed among the peoples"—deserves a close reading, because being scattered (mefuzar) is not in itself a fault. The Sfas Emes teaches the opposite: the scattering of Israel is for the good, to publicize His Name in every place — and, to extract the hidden sparks found in every place, as it is written "the righteousness of His open-walled villages in Israel" (tzidkas perazono be-Yisrael). The blemish lies only in the second word—"dispersed and severed" (meforad)—for the children of Israel must remain one unified bundle (agudah achas) even while scattered, just as they are called "seventy souls" (shiv'im nefesh) in the singular. The one who has gives; the one who receives is enriched; and among equals, each one's uniqueness flows to the other, so that no one is left holding only his own portion. The bundle is not made of identical stalks but of distinct gifts traded until all are bound — and that trading is the mitzvah (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5661).

• The Sfas Emes notices that Purim includes sending portions and gifts (mishlo'ach manos u-matanos), two interpersonal enactments that are not paired in this distinctive way at other festivals. Why are communal giving and friendship central to commemorating a victory over Haman? He explains the mechanism through the Divine oath that Hashem's Name and throne remain incomplete while Amalek persists. Klal Yisrael bear responsibility to sanctify and enlarge the revelation of Hashem's Name in the world. Their unity is one means through which that revelation becomes stronger. When individual Jews gather under the shared recognition of Hashem's kingship, they help reveal the unity of the Divine Name; when division breaks the collective, Amalek gains a

point of entry. Its taam is the anti-Amalek power of unity and the amplification of the honor of Heaven (kevod Shamayim) through that unity. By binding Jewish hearts together in friendship, Mishloach Manos counters the divisive power of Amalek and magnifies the honor of Heaven (kevod Shamayim) in the world (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5634).

• The Sfas Emes opens with the teaching that the mitzvah of sending portions of food is designed to foster love among Israel: the mitzvah as coming to establish love of fellow Jews. He does not stop with the everyday observation that gifts improve relationships. He asks what actually makes the Torah's command "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (ve-ahavta le-rei'acha kamocha) possible. Human beings are different in interests, temperament, and circumstances; treating another's welfare as one's own cannot rest permanently on superficial similarity. His answer is that beneath those differences is a common spiritual point of Divine life, the inner point of vitality (nekudah chiyus ha-penimiyus), where the souls of Israel are joined to one another. The result is a direct and distinctive taam: Mishloach Manos is an act through which love rooted in inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) becomes socially visible, making the Jews more capable of standing as one people before Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5631).

• The Sfas Emes develops the accusation of Haman that Klal Yisrael is "one nation, scattered and dispersed" (am echad mefuzar u-meforad). He explains Mordechai's work as gathering the people again: and Mordechai the righteous united them. The verb evokes sewing or repairing what has become torn apart. Mordechai did not manufacture a new people; he repaired the link among the parts of an existing collective. Esther's plea, "Go, gather all the Jews" (leich kenos kol ha-Yehudim), and the verse's account that "they gathered and stood up for their lives" (nik'halu ve-amod al nafsham) describe that restoration in action. Through Mishloach Manos and gifts to the poor, we continue Mordechai's work of repairing the fabric of Klal Yisrael and uniting every Jew in shared brotherhood (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5641).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

The primary purpose of the mitzvah of Mishloach Manos on Purim is to foster genuine affection, brotherhood, and peace among fellows. Observing two neighbors entrenched in a bitter and protracted feud, Avi decided to intervene: he prepared two elaborate, lavish gift baskets and delivered one to each neighbor, deceptively stating that it had been sent with deep goodwill by the other. The gesture successfully softened their hearts and brought about a lasting reconciliation. However, did Avi fulfill his personal obligation of Mishloach Manos through this anonymous, attributed delivery, given that neither recipient knew the gifts originated from him?

Answer: Analyzing the Chasam Sofer / Ksav Sofer (Orach Chaim Siman 141), Manos HaLevi, and Terumas HaDeshen (Siman 111), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that while sending anonymous Purim gifts in the name of one's neighbor to reconcile two enemies fulfills the supreme mitzvah of bringing peace between fellow men (hava'as shalom), the sender should also send a separate mishloach manos in his own name to a friend, because the mitzvah of mishloach manos requires fostering friendship between the sender himself and the recipient.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 238

Binyamin once planned to give his friend a very expensive, and very fancy cheesecake for mishloach manos. It was beautiful and cost a great deal of money. As Binyamin was bringing the cake over, he realized that even though he spent a lot of money on the cake, in order to properly fulfill the mitzvah he had to give two items and not just a cake. He was

waking up the steps to his friends apartment and he had nothing else to give. He suddenly thought of an idea! He had a knife in the car. He could cut the cake in half and give each part separately and then that would be two gifts. Could he fulfill his commandment to give mishloach manos by cutting a cake in half? On one hand you can say it is like giving two cakes. But on the other hand it was one cake that was cut. What do you think? Can he give a cake cut in half, and fulfill his obligation?

Answer: Regarding the question about the cake, Rav Zilberstein writes that he can cut it in half and fulfill his mitzvah. Please consult your Rav for any matters of practical Halachah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 114 (Table Talk Edition 222)

Chava's cousin, Stacy, was not observant. Chava decided that she would mail her cousin a nice mishloach manos package. It was filled with delicious treats and food that Chava knew Stacy liked. Chava shipped the package by UPS and the package arrived at Stacy's home right before Purim. Stacy received the mishloach manos on Purim and was truly thrilled. She called Chava to thank her for the very thoughtful package. She then said, I particularly loved the cookie tin that the foods were packed in. The tin is so adorable. After Stacy hung up, Chava had the following questions. She sent all the foods in a cheap pink tin cookie jar that she bought at a home-goods store. Chava never toiveled the tin. Was it ok for her to send the mishloach manos in a metal container if Stacy may use it without toiveling it? Did she perhaps do the wrong thing by sending her the mishloach manos in a container that may be used and was not toiveled? Then Chava wondered, after the fact, if it does need tevilah what is the best way for her to fix the situation? Should she tell Stacy to toivel it? Should she ask Stacy to send it back to her? Should she tell her to throw it out? Or can she just leave it as it is? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the mishloach manos tin, Rav Shuchatowitz answered as follows: The governing rule is that only the owner needs to be tovel and only the owner can be tovel the container. Hence, Chava bought the tin for her cousin and therefore does not need to be tovel it. The cousin on the other hand owns the tin and needs to be tovel. By sending her cousin this tin she transgressed lifnei iver since her cousin would not be tovel. Once it was done she should use common sense whether or not to tell her cousin what to do. Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered as follows: If the tin is something that is typically used as a cookie jar, it needs tevilah. If it is typically used only as a "package" for cookies, then it possibly may not. See Igros Moshe Y.D. chelek 2.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ David Neuman and his wife gave birth to a premature baby boy. His name was Benji. Because of the premature birth, Benji was born with brain damage. When he was four, he began to have seizures. The seizures were incredibly frightening and could last for up to an hour. They became increasingly severe until by the time he was 10 his parents felt it was impossible to continue. They visited the top neurologist and they were advised that with a brain surgery that would remove a section of Benji's brain, the seizures would stop. With great trepidation the parents consented to the procedure. The surgery was an overwhelming success. Benji's seizures were completely gone and he was able to live a completely normal life like everyone else and was enrolled in a mainstream school. But 4 years later when Benji was 14 there was a terrible accident. Benji was in front of his house with his father when a van delivering shaloch manos, pulled back because it missed the house. The van ran right into Benji, smashing his head into the curb. Benji's father watched helplessly as his son bled from his head. All his father could do was wrap his head with a towel until the ambulance arrived. Benji was in the icu for three days. His parents waited outside and davened. Finally a doctor came out with a very series face. "Are you Benji's father?" "Yes". It is a miracle but your son will make it. It was a literal miracle. You son was bleeding from his brain and his brain was

swelling. Normally one would die in that case. But we discovered that a portion of his brain was removed. That allowed the blood to drain there and relieved the pressure and swelling. His earlier surgery saved his life. The seizure and surgery, which seemed like the worst thing in the world, really saved his life. Benji is now in high school enrolled in Yeshivah Darchei Torah and lives a completely normal life.

Stories That Warm The Heart, By Rabbi Binyomin Penzik, Published by C.I.S. Publishers, p. 135

❖ Purim was an extremely busy day at the home of the Pnei Menachem. Throughout the day, well-wishers would come to bring mishloach manos and exchange good wishes with the Rebbe. One former talmid who felt deeply indebted to the Rosh Yeshivah decided to use the opportunity to express his gratitude. He surreptitiously placed an envelope with a substantial sum of money into the Rebbe's mishloach manos basket, hoping in this way to benefit the Rosh Yeshivah. He knew the Rosh Yeshivah would never accept money from him directly, and he figured that if the envelope was in an anonymous mishloach manos, the Rebbe would have no choice but to take it. How surprised he was the following day when the Rosh Yeshivah summoned him, returned the envelope with the money, and thanked him profusely while explaining that he preferred not to accept monetary gifts. The former talmid was flabbergasted. "There were tens of mishloach manos packages on the table. I did not put a name on mine. How did the Rosh Yeshivah know it was me?!" The Rosh Yeshivah answered, "Let me leave you with an important lesson that will be useful throughout your life. From the time people began coming to my house on Purim bearing mishloach manos—not just any mishloach manos, but many that had clearly been put together with tremendous thought—I accepted upon myself to study each one in order to properly thank each person for the time and effort he invested. When you brought yours, I made sure to look at it too."

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Dr. Sergei Adropov and his wife Natasha had a son Ilya. He was a very successful doctor living in St. Petersburg and his family was the focus of all of his attention. But in 1953, during Stalin's infamous 'Doctors' Plot,' Sergei was arrested. After he was arrested no friends wanted to have anything to do with Natasha and Ilya. Life had become very lonely and they became very poor. One year on Purim 6 year old Ilya asked his mother if they can celebrate Purim. Of course, but who are we going to give mishloach manos to, we don't have any friends? Natasha said, we do have one last friend - Hashem. They looked in their cupboard and only found one cookie to give. What else can we give to Hashem? We are going to sit together, think about our missing father and fill a cup with tears. Surely Hashem will hear our tears and cries. We will present Hashem with a cookie and a cup of our tears. They sat and filled the cup and placed it on the table with the cookie. Suddenly there was a loud knocking. Sergei was at the door. Ilya turned to his mother and said look Hashem has returned our mishloch manos to us with a gift of his own.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 280

❖ Mrs. Margolies, whose husband was close to the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon, was schmoozing with the Rebbetzin. "You must get so much mishloach manos each Purim," Mrs. Margolies commented. "Yes," the Rebbetzin replied, "Baruch Hashem, we do." "I assume you take them apart and redistribute them to others," Mrs. Margolies commented. "Oh no!" the Rebbetzin exclaimed, "Every single mishloach manos remains intact until at least one day after Purim." "Really?" Mrs. Margolies was surprised. "Why?" "I keep every mishloach manos intact," the Rebbetzin explained, "so that my husband can have the time to properly take note of them and appreciate them. Purim is such a busy day that he has no time. Yet, if the people who gave him the mishloach manos put in so much time and effort to prepare them, it is only proper that he should notice what they did so that he can acknowledge each one and properly express his appreciation."

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

D. TO GIVE GIFTS TO THE POOR

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 142:3

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Does someone who is poor have to give matanos laevyonim?
- How many matanos do you have to give to how many poor people?
- On Purim, are we as careful to make sure that it is a legitimate cause as we are during the year?
- What if a person lives in an affluent suburb, where there are no poor people collecting? What should he do?

KITZUR SHULCHAN ARUCH

Every person, even a poor Jew receiving charity, is obligated to give at least two gifts to two poor people, that is one gift to each one, as it is written: "gifts to poor people" implying (by the plural) two gifts to two poor persons. One is not to be too selective about money (given out) on Purim. Rather one should give to everyone that puts his hand out. One who is in a place where there are no poor, should keep the money to himself until he finds a poor person or send it to them?

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes explains why both forms of Purim giving were instituted in the context of the people gathering against Haman. At Sinai the Torah's gathering was initiated through Hashem's command, but during Purim the people gathered of their own accord. The Sfas Emes places great weight on that choice. It made possible a renewed commitment to Torah from below, and it created the unity in which Amalek could no longer govern the nation. He reads the singular phrase “and the Jews accepted” (ve-kibeil ha-Yehudim) as testimony that the many had become one. Ensuring that every needy Jew is included in the joy of Purim completes our national unity so that the entire community stands as one before Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5661).

• The Sfas Emes begins by asking why Chazal specifically enacted the combination of sending portions and gifts (mishlo'ach manos u-matanos) for Purim. He explains that Klal Yisrael have the task of making Hashem's Name great and holy in the world. That task becomes stronger when Jews recognize their connection and join together in accepting His kingship. He relates the principle to “Hear O Israel” (Shema Yisrael) and to the continued opposition of Amalek, which seeks to interrupt the manifestation of that Divine unity. By uniting mishloach manos and matanos la'evyonim into a single movement of brotherhood and generosity toward the poor, Purim heals social division at its root and brings the complete revelation of Hashem's Name into the community (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Purim 5634).

• The institution of the day lists three acts: the feast, the portions to friends, and the gifts to the poor. The feast and the portions have an obvious logic — a shared joy, a visible unity. But the gifts to the poor send the day's wealth in the one direction from which no response can come: the pauper cannot reciprocate, and his gratitude does not strengthen the giver's standing among his peers. Why, then, did Mordechai and Esther make the poor man's joy a pillar of the day's simcha — equal in the verse to the feast itself? One could answer that this is ordinary tzedaka, a kindness appended to the celebration. The gift to the poor is thus the day's tikkun: what is

sent outward to the pauper returns inward to the giver as restored standing. This implies that Purim's joy is not indulgence but recovery — the simcha of a soul being handed back what it had lost (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas Shekalim 5641).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man sought to distribute Matanos LaEvyonim anonymously on Purim. He went to a neighborhood grocery store and paid off the outstanding grocery debts of several impoverished families. Does this charitable act fulfill the specific biblical and rabbinic mitzvah of Matanos LaEvyonim on Purim day, or is it merely considered general tzedakah that assisted the grocer in collecting his debts?

Answer: Based on the Ritva (Megillah 7a) and Rambam (Hilchos Megillah 2:17) — who explain that Matanos LaEvyonim is not merely general tzedakah, but a specific obligation to bring Purim joy (simchah) to the poor on Purim day — Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that secretly paying off a poor person's old grocery store debt does not fulfill the mitzvah of Matanos LaEvyonim, because the poor person receives no tangible food or money on Purim with which to rejoice (unless extinguishing the debt immediately unlocks store credit allowing him to take his Purim seudah food that day with his knowledge).

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 82

One of the Gedolim gave his gabbai (his secretary) a check for $1000 to distribute to the poor on Purim. The gabbai gladly assumed the responsibility. During the course of that day, the gabbai met one of the very wealthy philanthropists of Eretz Yisrael, and told him that he had a check from the Gadol hador in his pocket. The philanthropist, in a joyful and generous Purim mood, made the gabbai a very generous offer: "I would love to have this check to frame and display in my office", the philanthropist said. "I'll tell you what; I will give you $50,000 to distribute on behalf of the Gadol, if you give me his check". The gabbai thought it was an exceptional deal. He could turn the Gadol's $1,000 into $50,000 and help so many needy people. He promptly handed over the check, and the philanthropist wrote a check of $50,000. The gabbai cashed the check, and on Purim he distributed $50,000 to the poor on behalf of the Gadol. With just a few minutes left to Purim, the gabbai, at his seudah, had the following flash of terror. Maybe he had made a mistake! The Gadol's check would never be cashed; his money would stay in the bank. Although the gabbai gave out so much money on the Gadol's behalf, perhaps the Gadol never fulfilled the mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim. On one hand, his check was responsible for $50,000 worth of donations to the poor. But on the other hand, the Gadol never actually donated any of his own money to the poor. His check was never cashed. Should the gabbai contact the Gadol at the last minute to tell him to give matanos la'evyonim. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of the framed check, Rav Zilberstein has strong arguments on both sides, and he was inconclusive. But he seems to lean in the direction that the mitzvah was fulfilled, because the main function of matanos l'evyonim is simcha for the poor people, and since his check caused much simcha to many poor people even if it was never cashed he fulfilled the mitzvah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 138 (Table Talk Edition #113 (Parshas Beshalach))

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ They said of Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon—who was so trustworthy as communal charity treasurer that Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov declared one should entrust charity funds only to someone like him—that once on Purim, coins collected for the communal Purim feast became mixed up in his pouch with general charity coins, and he distributed them to the poor

for Purim without realizing the mix-up. As soon as he realized what had happened, he reimbursed the entire general charity fund from his own personal pocket rather than ever touch a single coin of the poor!

Maseches Kallah 5:4 (and Avodah Zarah 17b)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ During the first year after Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta had accepted a rabbinical position in Jassy, the local townsmen sent him a number of gold coins on Purim as Mishloach"' Manos. Seeing his father playing with them, his son Reb Yitzchak Meir was amazed, for he knew him to be a man who loathed money. "Father," he asked, "what has made you suddenly throw off your characteristic hatred of money?" "Throughout the year," explained the tzaddik, "I treat gold with scorn. I don't value it in the least. But today's mitzvah obliges me to give gifts of money to the poor, Mattanos LaEvyonim. This means that I would be giving them something which in my eyes is worthless. I therefore decided today to make an effort to introduce the love of money into my heart. When that reaches a peak, then I will distribute it among the needy!"

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 291

❖ In Williamsburg years ago, Rav Manis Mandel, the beloved principal of Yeshivah of Brooklyn, quietly cared for the most forgotten people in town. In Williamsburg years ago, there was a strange fellow who lived alone and relied on the kindness of others to survive. Sadly his hygiene left something to be desired, and he walked around with old dirty clothes and he smelled. One Purim in the middle of their seudah, with their table surrounded with their children and guests, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Mandel excused themselves to their children and guests and quietly left the house for a while. No one knew where the holy couple went in the middle of the seudah. But after a while, the secret got out. The Mandels knew that this poor fellow was out soliciting tzedakah for himself, on Purim. They, therefore, took the opportunity to secretly go to his apartment to change his linen, and clean his rooms.

From Rabbi Manis Mandel, A Legendary Mechanech and Tzadik. By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ R' Yiddel Edelman, didn't usually do errands. He was in the bank on Erev Purim. When asked why, he explained that he wanted to fulfill hiddur mitzvah: instead of handing out crumpled bills, he wanted to give crisp, fresh bills to poor people to make them feel even better.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 32

CHANUKAH: THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS & DEDICATION

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section relate to observing the holiday of Chanukah. This is a holiday that reminds us of the eternal and transcendent nature of the Torah.

39. To Celebrate Chanukah

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:8)

Chanuka. The yevanim wanted to pull Yisrael from avodas Hashem and yirah. Hashem made the kohanim win which allowed Yisrael to return to Torah and avodas Hashem. The yevanim destroyed the menorah because they opposed what it represented, but the kohanim were able to reestablish the menorah. The destruction and reestablishment of the menorah was a microcosm of the persecution of the yevanim and Yisrael's success. On Chanuka we access that same hara of returning to the Torah.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Yochanan recounted in the name of Rabbah bar Bar Chanah: There were two elders in Sidon; one lit the Chanukah lamps according to Beis Shammai (decreasing from eight to one, like the festival offerings), and the other lit according to Beis Hillel (increasing from one to eight, because in matters of holiness we always ascend and never descend!). And what is the miracle of Chanukah? Our Rabbis taught: When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oils in the Sanctuary. When the Hasmonean royal house prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only a single cruse of pure oil resting with the seal of the High Priest intact, containing only enough oil to burn for a single day. A miracle occurred with it, and they kindled the Menorah from it for eight days; the following year, the Sages established these eight days as festive days of praise and thanksgiving.

Shabbos 21b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Mr. Chiune Sugihara served as Japan's Vice-Consul in Kovno, Lithuania, during the early years of World War II. In 1940, as Nazi forces advanced through Europe, thousands of Jewish refugees fled to Lithuania, desperate for visas to escape to safe territories. Despite opposition from the Japanese government, Sugihara defied orders and issued transit visas that allowed an estimated 6,000 Jews to escape the Holocaust via Japan. Working tirelessly, he handwrote visas day and night, even continuing his efforts from the train platform as he was being reassigned. Sugihara's moral courage and deep compassion earned him the title of "Japanese Schindler." In interviews with people who actually knew him, Sugihara's kindness is often emphasized. The following story illustrates Sugihara's everyday goodness and compassion: Shortly after arriving in Kovno, Mr. Sugihara entered a gourmet food shop owned by a Jewish woman, where he met her young nephew, Solly Ganor. Solly, like many other youngsters in Lithuania, had given all his Chanukah money to help the refugees streaming into the country. He stopped by his aunt's shop, asking her for a coin so he could go see a show, explaining that he had given all his money to tzedakah (charity). To Solly's surprise, it was Mr. Sugihara who offered him a coin. At first, Solly was taken aback, having never seen a man with slanted eyes. He described Sugihara as having a kind aura about him. Solly said he could not accept

money from a stranger, to which Sugihara replied, "Consider me your uncle; I'll be your uncle for the holiday." Young Solly felt he should invite his newfound "uncle" to their family's Chanukah party, taking place at their house on Motza'ei Shabbos. To everybody's surprise, Mr. and Mrs. Sugihara showed up at the Ganors' Chanukah celebration. Another guest, a refugee from Warsaw, was recounting his escape from Poland and broke down crying. This appeared to have made a very strong impression on the compassionate heart of Mr. Sugihara. Soon after that, Mr. Sugihara began his heroic efforts to issue transit visas to the desperate Jews of Kovno.

From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press

❖ We knew that neginah was something very dear to Rabbi Manis Mandel's heart. He wanted us to have that same feeling. Many times he told us about the man who offered his nephew a ride in his car. Seeing that his passenger was uncomfortable with the Greek music he was playing, the man apologized. "I'm a composer of Jewish music," he explained, "and this is where I get my inspiration. I'm under pressure to come up with some new songs for my new album which I plan to release before Chanukah."

From Rabbi Manis Mandel: A Legendary Mechanech and Tzaddik, by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Raphael Mendlowitz was shopping for Chanukah presents for his children at a large toy store in Maryland. He noticed a father and daughter also buying toys for Chanukah. They had already filled their cart with some toys, and the young girl was busy looking for a few more. The girl picked up a doll and asked her father, "Does this cost too much?" Her father replied. "No, it's fine. You may have it." The girl put it into their cart and then picked up a second doll. She asked her father if she could buy that doll too. "Sure," said her father, and the girl dropped the doll into their cart. Rabbi Mendlowitz's attention was quickly drawn to a father and son who were also shopping for Chanukah presents. The young girl with the dolls was also listening to their conversation. They overheard the boy begging his father to buy him a remote-control car. The father told his son it was too expensive, but the boy persisted. "Please. Tatty." he pleaded, "this would be the best Chanukah present I ever got! Please buy it for me!" "You know we can't afford it," his father said. "Let's go over to the last aisle and you can pick out some nice stickers." The boy sadly walked away. The young girl turned to her father and said, "I've decided I don't want the second doll." She put it back on the shelf and walked over to the next aisle, where she picked up the remote-control car that the young boy had been eyeing and put it in her cart. A few minutes later, Rabbi Mendlowitz was waiting in line to pay for his purchases. In front of him were the girl and her father. He watched as the girl handed over the remote control car to the cashier after her father paid for it, whispering something into his ear. The cashier put the car under his counter. Rabbi Mendlowitz paid for his toys and watched as the man and his son, who were standing behind him, prepared to pay for their stickers. Suddenly, the cashier began shouting, "Congratulations! Congratulations! You are our one-thousandth customer this week. You have won a brand-new remote-control car!" He reached under the counter, took out the car, and handed it to the boy. The boy looked startled, and then his face broke out in a huge smile. He jumped up and down and shouted, "This is my best Chanukah present ever! " Rabbi Mendlowitz noticed the girl and her father smiling at each other as they left the store. He was very moved by the beautiful act of kindness that he had just witnessed. Coincidentally, Rabbi Mendlowitz's car was parked right next to the car that belonged to the father and daughter. As he walked to his car, he overheard the father say to her. "That was a very nice thing you just did. You know, though, that Bubby and Zaidy really sent you money for Chanukah to buy toys for yourself." The young girl turned to her father and answered, "Bubby and Zaidy said I should buy whatever would make me happy, and giving the car to that boy made me happy!" What a wonderful lesson we can all learn from this young girl. Sometimes you can enjoy a gift more by giving it away to someone else than by having it yourself.

For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers

A. TO LIGHT THE MENORAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-7

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to kindle the Chanukah lights on each of the eight nights of Chanukah, in order to commemorate and publicize the miracle of the oil (pirsumei nisa) and the victory granted to the Chashmonaim.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Chanuka reminds us that the Torah will never be forgotten or lost, because the Torah isn't dependent on the normal laws on nature. It transcends nature.

It also reminds us that with matters of Torah, with Hashem's help, even one small family, like a small bottle of oil, can make a greatly disproportionate impact in spreading the light of Torah. It also inspires us to resist the temptation to assimilate into the attractive culture around us. This message helps to inspire ourselves to commit ourselves to the Torah and perfect ourselves, and bring light to the world.

RELATED HASHKAFAH TOPICS:

- Discuss why there is no mitzvah to have a meal on Chanuka, like on Purim.
- Discuss the idea of pirsumei nissa, why we want to publicize the miracle.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes transmits his grandfather's interpretation of the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel over "continually decreasing" (pocheis ve-holeich) or "continually increasing" (mosif ve-holeich). A flame has two powers: it shines, and it burns. Spiritually, these are two ways of progressing toward Hashem. One approach first removes the spiritual dross (pesolet), the parts of the person's conduct that obstruct holiness. Only after that clearing can the inner fire of longing be developed. That is the spiritual direction associated with the decreasing number of lights. Whether we begin by burning away spiritual dross (Beis Shammai) or by continually increasing the light of holiness (Beis Hillel), the Chanukah flames unite both powers of sacred fire (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5654).

• The Sfas Emes asks why the basic law of Chanukah is "a candle for a person and his household" (ner ish u-veiso): what distinguishes this mitzvah from other commandments, and what does it have to do with the house? If so, why shouldn't every obligated person kindle for himself? The answer: when all of a person's forces gather together with his household that belongs to him, he can fulfill the mitzvah more completely. The unit of the mitzvah is not the individual soul but the whole camp he carries with him — because the mission of the candle requires all of it. The Chanukah candle is placed outside — that a person might bring, through his deeds, illumination into the place of darkness; and for this he needs to take with him all that depends on him. (The mehadrin's candle for each

one is the higher level — repairing each particular of those dependent on him; and we — would that we merit to repair in general.) The taam is therefore the opposite of withdrawal: the candle goes out to the street, and it takes the whole house with it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5634).

• The Sfas Emes asks why the original miracle involved only enough pure oil for one night and required that limited supply to extend beyond its natural capacity. His answer is that the form of the miracle reveals something fundamental about Klal Yisrael: an indestructible inner point always remains within the souls of Israel through which Divine salvation can arrive. The Greeks could violate the Mikdash and defile much that surrounded it, but they could not uproot the covenantal life at the nation's deepest source. The seal, the Kohen Gadol, Avraham's promise, Aharon's love, and the eight-day unfolding are all stages of one carefully developed argument about a point of holiness (kedushah) that remains intact and can grow again (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5647).

• The Sfas Emes cites his grandfather's teaching that the Greeks attempted to transform the private domain (reshus ha-yachid) into the public domain (reshus ha-rabbim). They entered the Mikdash, breached its boundaries, and defiled its oils. The underlying assault was far more than damage to a building; it was an attempt to make the realm dedicated to Divine unity subject to the competing powers and external interests of the public world. The Sfas Emes then develops the response through the principle of spiritual reversal: Hashem's salvation exposed holiness even within the very public domain that the Greeks sought to dominate. Extending his grandfather's insight, the Sfas Emes shows how kindling the Chanukah lights at the doorway transforms the public domain itself into a vessel for Divine unity (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5642).

• The matter of fixing the mitzvah in candles, and that the miracle was in candles: for it is written, "The soul of man is the lamp of Hashem" (Mishlei 20:27)—thus Bnei Yisrael are candles through which the light of Torah can be revealed. And the tikkun of Yisrael's souls to be candles is through the mitzvos, which repair the souls of Yisrael in the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. And the wicked, who wanted to make us forget the Torah and remove us from the statutes of His will — wanted to extinguish this candle, and the Torah-light that is in the world through the souls of Yisrael. And this is what is taught in the Midrash, "yours endures forever" (shelcha le-olam kayemes), which Ramban explained on the Chanukah candles: since Aharon merited to raise the seven lamps toward the face of the Menorah (pnei ha-Menorah), that supernal light shines forever to bring salvation in every generation (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5653).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

There is a mitzvah of Hiddur Mitzvah, to beautify a mitzvah, and one application of the mitzvah is to purchase a beautiful Chanukah menorah. Yitzchak went to the Judaica store to choose a menorah. The store had silver menorahs. They were relatively small, and plain. They also had a large shiny chrome menorah that had a design that Yitzchak really loved. He thought it was the most beautiful menorah design he had ever seen. The plain silver menorah cost more than the beautiful chrome menorah. Yitzchak wondered which would be preferred to fulfill the mitzvah of hiddur mitzvah. The one that looked more beautiful, or the one that cost more money and was made of a more expensive metal. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of which menorah is preferred, Rav Zilberstein writes that Hiddur Mitzvah means that one should buy the menorah with a more precious metal, even if the design is not as beautiful.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 48 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 107 (Chanukah))

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ And thus it says: "Toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps give light" (Bamidbar 8:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "It is not because I need the light of flesh and blood that I commanded you concerning the lamps of the Menorah, but rather to elevate you and so that you may know how beloved you are before Me!" "That they take unto you pure olive oil" (Shemos 27:20) — the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "Not that I need the lamp; rather, 'that they take unto you' — for your own sake, so that you may see where you are entering and coming out." To what may this matter be compared? To a sighted man and a blind man who were walking together along a long road. All along the journey, the sighted man held the blind man's arm, supported him over every obstacle, and guided him safely. When evening came and they finally entered the house, the sighted man said to the blind man: "Come, go and light this lamp and shine it for me!" Astonished, the blind man said to him: "My friend, all the while we were out on the road, you supported me and guided me until we came into the house, and I cannot even see — and now you ask me to light this lamp and shine it for you?!" In Bamidbar Rabbah (15:5) and Shemos Rabbah (36:2), the sighted man gives him this unforgettable answer: "Precisely so that you will not feel indebted or ashamed before me for guiding you all along the road — that is why I told you to light the lamp for me, so that you could do a favor for me in return!" So too, the sighted one is the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is written: "The eyes of Hashem range throughout the whole earth" (Zecharyah 4:10), Who guided Israel through the wilderness with His pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night; and the blind one represents Israel in exile, of whom it is written: "We grope for the wall like the blind" (Yeshayahu 59:10). Once they built the Mishkan, the Holy One, blessed be He, called them and said: "Kindle the Menorah before Me — not because I need your light, but so that you will not feel like beggars eating bread of shame for all the miracles I performed for you on the road, and so that if you kindle lamps before Me in this world, I will shine upon you from the great supernal light in the Time to Come, as it is said: 'And Hashem shall be unto you for an everlasting light' (Yeshayahu 60:19)!"

Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 4:2-4 & Parallels Bamidbar Rabbah 15:5 / Shemos Rabbah 36:2

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Satmar Rebbe was freed from Bergen Belsen 4 days before Chanukah. He was brought to the Swiss city of Montreaux for Chanukah. On the first night of Chanukah he was asked to light the menorah at his hosts house. He took out the wicks that were prepared and took out wicks from his pocket. With powerful tears he made the berachah and lit them. He said the wicks he took out of his pocket were made by him in the camps. He had no idea how to light but he began making wicks by weaving thread from his clothing. The wicks made with this mesiras nefash are much more beloved than regular wicks. They were also a much more apt symbol of the Chanukah message. It symbolized our mesiras nefesh to continue the light of Torah despite all odds.

Touched by a Story Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 213

❖ Yosef Mendelovitz was a refusenick in solitary confinement. He lit menorah by etching a menorah in the wall and lighting a thread. It lit for only a short time, but it kept him inspired. When asked how he was able to do that, he said, just as you can't stop a tree from growing, you can't stop an inspired neshamah.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 105

B. NOT TO USE THE MENORAH FOR ANY MUNDANE USE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-9

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to derive any personal or mundane benefit (tashmish chol) from the light of the Chanukah candles, even for a casual task such as counting coins or reading a text; nor may one light even another sacred item from their flame, for these lights are designated solely for publicizing the miracle and expressing thanksgiving to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes begins from the liturgical declaration “and we have no permission to make personal use of them, only to look at them” (ve-ein lanu reshus le-hishtameish bahem rak lir'osam) and the special significance Chazal assign to seeing a Chanukah lamp. Instead of understanding that contrast only as a technical restriction, he asks what kind of seeing the mitzvah seeks to create. The lamp shines so that every Jewish soul (kol nefesh Yisrael) may examine itself, in the spirit of the Mishnah's instruction, “Reflect upon three things” (histakeil bi-sheloshah devarim). The original miracle of light is suited to people whose spiritual sight has become clouded. Looking purely at the sacred Chanukah lights without using them for mundane tasks trains our eyes to look inward, recognize the pure spark within the soul, and return to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5632).

• The Sfas Emes places two statements in tension. The Chanukah hymn declares, “These lights are sacred” (ha-neiros ha-lelu kodesh heim), while the Gemara asks "Does an ordinary lamp possess intrinsic holiness?"—does an ordinary lamp possess intrinsic sacred status? The Sfas Emes explains that the practical prohibition against using the lamp is itself part of what awakens its holiness. When Chazal forbade ordinary benefit and the Jews deliberately set the lamp apart for His blessed Name (li-shmo yisbarach), a boundary was created between its function as a physical object and its dedication to Hashem. The result is that the concealed kedushah belonging to the mitzvah becomes manifest. By refraining from any personal benefit, we honor the sacred boundary that allows the hidden holiness of the Chanukah lights to shine forth (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5639).

• The Midrash on Naso takes a small halacha and makes it a theological monument: one who has leftover oil from the Chanukah lamp and makes a bonfire with it: it was designated for its mitzvah. The imagined protester objects: I will not fulfill the commandments of the elders; these are only rabbinic customs, not Torah law, so who forbids me? The Sfas Emes explains the inner dynamic: when the Sages institute a mitzvah, true kedusha rests upon it as if it were explicit in the Torah, and their words become Torah. Iron has great strength, but when it is not driven into place it can be pulled out; a sapling is soft, yet once planted it cannot be pulled up, and it is fruitful, multiplying, producing offspring. Were rabbinic kedusha mere custom, there would be nothing to violate — but the prohibition binds with the force of Torah. The ban on the light's use is thus evidence, carried inside the halacha itself, that a rabbinic decree carries divine kedusha (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5650).

• The Sfas Emes cites the Ran's explanation of the view that one may not use the Chanukah light for ordinary purposes: Chazal established the lamps as a remembrance of the Menorah of the Beis HaMikdash. This inherited legal background immediately raises a deeper question. Is the present lamp only a historical symbol reminding the observer of a once-existing sacred service, or does the act of performing this remembrance awaken something of the original Menorah's light? The Sfas Emes chooses the stronger spiritual formulation: through this the

holiness of the Menorah is awakened to rest upon the candles. Building upon the Ran's explanation, the Sfas Emes teaches that honoring the sanctity of the Chanukah candles awakens the living light of the Temple Menorah in our own homes (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5635).

• The poskim rule it is forbidden to use the Chanukah light — and give the reason: because it is a remembrance of the Temple Menorah (she-hu zecher la-Menorah). We may wonder: how does a ban constitute a memorial? The Sfas Emes explains the inner dynamic: the Chanukah candles carry something of the Menorah's light; through the candles the Children of Israel remember the Menorah's lights and long for them, and through the longing, that same illumination of the Menorah is awakened. At the heart of this teaching is desire, not utility: the Menorah itself was never lit because Hashem needed light, but as testimony that the Shechinah dwells among Israel; so too the Chanukah light is testimony, not a lamp. A candle that is used disappears into its utility; a candle that may only be seen remains a signpost, and every year its glow carries the worshiper back to the Menorah in the Heichal — which is exactly what the poskim meant by calling the ban itself the remembrance (zecher) (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5640).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

If consecrated oil from a burning Chanukah menorah dripped into a bowl of salad, is the salad permitted for consumption, or does the oil render the entire mixture forbidden?

Answer: Based on the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 677:4) and Mishnah Berurah, oil set aside in a Chanukah menorah is consecrated for its mitzvah (huktzah l'mitzvah). However, if a drop of oil accidentally fell from the menorah into a large bowl of salad where there is sixty times (shishim) more salad than oil, the oil is nullified (batel b'shishim) and the salad is permitted to be eaten.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 327

C. TO SAY HALLEL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 39-2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to recite the complete Hallel (Hallel ha-Gomer) with its accompanying blessings on all eight days of Chanukah, expressing boundless joy and gratitude to Hashem for the miracles, deliverance, and wonders wrought for our ancestors.



SEDER SEVEN • SECTION TWO: EDIFYING MITZVOS

EDUS: TESTIMONY & SANCTIFYING SYMBOLS

Sacred Insignia, Bodily Covenants, and Divine Portions

OVERVIEW

The next mitzvah category is the Mitzvos of Edus. Each of the mitzvos in this category use concrete symbols to testify and remind us of their fundamental lessons. As in the previous category of Moadim, when we perform these mitzvos, and think about their lessons, we access a powerful influence that serves to elevate and inspire us.

The most basic mitzvah in this category is the mitzvah of Tefillin. They can be used as a template to appreciate the rest of the mitzvos in this category. Tefillin are black leather boxes that men are required to strap on their left arm, across from their heart, and on their head on top of their cerebrum. Inside the leather boxes are four passages of the Torah. Those passages describe the following: There is one Creator who wants us all to fulfill His will with every facet of our life. The Bnei Yisrael (Children of Yisrael) were redeemed from Mitzraim in order to be the Almighty's people who fulfill His will. If we fulfill His will, we will merit the Almighty's protective closeness and blessings. But if we don't, the Shechina, the Almighty's presence will withdraw, and naturally we will fall prey to a host of troubles. In short, these four passages are enjoining us to fulfill the Almighty's mitzvos and merit His closeness. So we take these passages, and place them upon our arm. As we strap them on, we think, that "I am hereby dedicating my arm, and my actions to the idea contained inside of the Tefillin; namely, that I pledge to dedicate my arm to fulfill the Almighty's will". We put it across from our heart, and express that we are dedicating our emotions to fulfill the Almighty's will. We put it on top of our cerebrum where we think from, and we express that we are dedicating our thoughts to fulfill the Almighty's will. When we have the idea of Tefillin in mind, when we have in mind that we are dedicating and subordinating our actions, emotions, and intellect to serve the Almighty, we then draw forth a sanctifying hashpa, an incredible spiritual energy from heaven. That spiritual energy gives us a spirit of holiness which gives us the ability to indeed subordinate our entire physical body to fulfill the Almighty's will.

The same is true for all of the mitzvos in this category. Tzitzis, Shofar, Sukkah, Matzah, Mezuzah etc. Each of these mitzvos has a certain lesson that it teaches. When we concentrate on the ideas they are conveying to us, we draw forth to ourselves a spiritual influence that gives us a particular and unique spiritual strength. Every one of these mitzvos has its own unique lesson and spiritual influence, and each and every one of these influences is needed to give us the spiritual strength necessary to achieve our lofty goal of shleimus.

TEFILLIN: THE COVENANT OF HEART AND MIND

SECTION OVERVIEW

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edus have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, each of these mitzvos gives us a hashpa, (spiritual influence) that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

1. To Put on Hand Tefillin

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 8

As the Torah says, And you shall bind them for a sign upon Your hand (Devarim 6:8, Parshas Va'eschanan).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Where do we put the hand tefillin?
- Which part of the bicep?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic placement for the leather housing (bayis) of the hand-tefillin (tefillin shel yad) is upon the bicep muscle of the weaker arm, positioned precisely on its raised, fleshy swelling (kibores) and angled slightly inward toward the heart.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edus have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, each of these mitzvos gives us a hashpa, (spiritual influence) that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

In the particular case of Tefillin, putting on Tefillin express our commitment to dedicate our hands and actions, heart and emotions, head and intellect to fulfill Hashem's will. When we put them on, we absorb a hashpa, which helps us indeed dedicate and sanctify those parts of our body. This commitment and influence helps us to commit ourselves to the task of perfecting our character through Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 421)

We are constantly locked in a battle between our body and our soul. The wearing of the Tefillin helps to give the neshamah more strength to win its battle over the body. By strapping them to our hand, heart, and head, Tefillin remind us to control our yetzer hara, and to dedicate our entire lives our bodies, emotions, and thoughts, to serve Hashem.

ABARBANEL (IBID.)

Tefillin remind us to dedicate our hands (actions), heart (emotions), and head (intellect) to serve Hashem.

RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI

The Gemara says that Hashem wears tefillin as well. The scrolls in Hashem's tefillin say "Who is like your people Israel, one nation in the land". Just as Hashem wears His "Tefillin" showing His pride in his one and only people, so must we demonstrate our pride in the one Hashem.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:6)

Tefillin is far greater than tzitzis. Hashem gave tefillin the ability to draw upon us kedushah from Hashem himself. This causes all of our faculties both physical and spiritual to be enveloped within this kedushah and they get perfected. The shem Hashem is nikra on you and all of the world will see it.

There are two primary evarim of a person in which the neshamah is most manifest. They are the moach and the lev. First the ohr gets drawn to the moach and to the neshamah that is in it through the tefillin shel rosh, and then the ohr is drawn to the lev and to the neshamah that is in it through the tefillin shel yad. After that the whole body gets perfected. Thereby, all of a person's faculties are submerged in this hashpa of kedushah and it gives him great kedushah.

All of the details of halachos tefillin are needed in order to be mashlim this tikkun.

SFAS EMES

• Halachah requires the tefillin shel yad to be put on before the shel rosh. The Sfas Emes sees this order as a general rule of avodas Hashem. The shel yad represents what the human being can prepare from below. He binds his strength, heart, desires, and actions to Hashem. Once that preparation has been made, the shel rosh represents a higher illumination that can be received from above. He writes that through binding one's strength and heart to Hashem, one later merits the illumination from above represented by the tefillin shel rosh. Yiras chet prepares chochmah. A person first gives himself to Hashem with the faculties he already possesses, and that commitment creates room for something higher to enter (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5642).

• The pasuk gives one of the clearest statements of the purpose of tefillin: "in order that the Torah of Hashem may be in your mouth." The Sfas Emes understands this as the awakening of a Torah already hidden within the Jewish soul. He says that Hashem has sealed and engraved (chasam) the letters of Torah within the souls of Israel. The soul living inside the body resembles the holy writing enclosed inside the tefillin. In a later teaching he explains that these Torah letters engraved in the Jewish soul require renewal every day. Tefillin renew the spiritual imprint

and engraving (reshimah va-chakikah). The words "so that the Torah of Hashem may be in your mouth" (Toras Hashem be-ficha) thus describe the final stage of a process that begins much deeper: the Torah hidden within the soul becomes conscious, articulate, and capable of entering speech and life (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5644).

• In 5656 the Sfas Emes offers an extraordinary description of tefillin. He compares their four parshiyos to the Torah itself and speaks of Hashem's love for Israel in allowing every Jew to carry a Sefer Torah with him. The physical parchment and ink form only part of this living sefer. The tefillin are placed upon a Jewish arm and head, and the person himself becomes part of the completed structure. The Sfas Emes says that the sefer becomes complete through the act of wearing the tefillin. Chazal describe Torah itself as producing spiritual freedom (cheirus), and the tefillin carry that Torah directly upon the Jewish body. The freedom of Yetzias Mitzrayim therefore reaches its purpose when the Jew becomes a living sefer shaped by Torah (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5656).

• The Torah calls tefillin an os (a covenantal sign), yet tefillin are not worn on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Chazal explain that Shabbos and Yom Tov are themselves an os (a covenantal sign). The Sfas Emes uses this halachah to define what the sign of tefillin accomplishes during the weekdays (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5640, 5649)

• One of the central physical acts of tefillin is binding (keshirah). The Torah says "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand." The Sfas Emes connects this binding directly to Yetzias Mitzrayim. He cites the Zohar's description of Pharaoh as one who had spiritually bound his slaves so tightly that they could not escape. Hashem broke those bonds at the Exodus and then gave Klal Yisrael a holy form of binding. The daily binding of tefillin takes the historical freedom of Egypt and directs it toward avodas Hashem. The Jew places the strap around his arm as a physical expression that his strength and actions now belong to a higher purpose (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5645).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

70's. While visiting the city of Leningrad, he met hundreds of Jews. When he told them he had tefillin, many lined up for the opportunity to put them on. He was able to inspire and teach countless Jews who were deeply thirsty for Torah and their heritage. Eventually, he had to leave. But he realized that once he left, these hundreds of Jews would no longer have access to tefillin. He did not know of any other tefillin in the city. He began to wonder: Should he leave his tefillin behind? The problem was that if he did, he wouldn't have tefillin to use during his travels. He would end up missing the mitzvah for at least one day. So he asked Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv: Would it be permitted to miss one day of tefillin so that hundreds of people could put it on for the next hundreds of days, or even years? Perhaps you could argue that if he missed one day, the merit of all those mitzvos would go to his credit. Or maybe we say that one is not allowed to miss tefillin, even if it enables hundreds of others to fulfill the mitzvah for many more days. What do you think? Can he miss one day, so that hundreds can gain for many more?

Answer: Regarding the question about whether a man could leave his Tefillin behind, Rav Elyashiv answered that all the people in the city in Russia were considered anusim (prevented by circumstances beyond their control) and therefore were exempt from the mitzvah of Tefillin entirely. However, this man, who had Tefillin and could put them on, was not an oness and was obligated. Therefore, he would not be permitted to leave his Tefillin behind, since the others actually did not have an obligation.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Four, Hebrew Edition p. 105

In 1942 in the Kovno Ghetto, a teenage Jewish boy whose leg had been amputated was recovering in the ghetto hospital. German hospital regulations dictated that to prevent infectious disease, all personal effects of discharged patients were incinerated in a furnace. The boy sent an urgent plea to Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, begging for a pair of kosher tefillin to fulfill the mitzvah while hospitalized. If tefillin were sent into the hospital, they could never be retrieved and would inevitably be burned upon the boy's discharge, permanently destroying sacred scrolls containing the Names of Hashem and depriving other ghetto inmates of their use. Which takes priority: enabling a suffering youth to fulfill the mitzvah of tefillin, even though the tefillin will ultimately be incinerated, or withholding the tefillin to safeguard them from desecration and preserve them for the community?

Answer: Rav Ephraim Oshry ruled that the kosher pair of tefillin should be sent secretly via a trusted messenger to the teenage amputee in the Kovno Ghetto hospital so he could fulfill his burning desire to put on tefillin before his death. First, just as Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon held a Sefer Torah to fulfill the mitzvah of Torah study and relied on Heaven's mercy rather than refraining out of fear that the Romans would burn the scroll (Avodah Zarah 18a), here too one fulfills the immediate mitzvah in the present moment ('ein la-mitzvah ela sha'atah'). Second, sending tefillin for the sake of a mitzvah is the exact opposite of destructive intent ('derech hashchasah,' Minchas Chinuch, Mitzvah 437) and at worst constitutes mere indirect causation (grama, Shabbos 120b), especially since the rumor that the Germans burned patients' belongings upon discharge was unverified and the tefillin were delivered covertly (Shach, Yoreh Deah 286:7). Rav Oshry records that the boy wept with joy as he donned the tefillin daily; tragically, on 3 Tishrei 5702, the Nazis burned down the Little Ghetto hospital with all sixty patients and doctors inside, but moments before the flames reached him, the boy handed the tefillin through a window to a Jew who escaped and returned them safely.

— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 3, Siman 1

A man discovered that his tefillin had become passul (ritually invalid). While waiting to purchase new ones, he borrows his friend's tefillin each morning after his friend concludes his prayers. However, during the communal Shacharis service while his friend is wearing the kosher pair, this man sits without tefillin. May he put on his invalid tefillin without reciting a blessing, simply to avoid public embarrassment and uncomfortable scrutiny from the congregation?

Answer: Based on the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 13:3) and Mishnah Berurah (13:9) — which permit wearing a tallis whose tzitzis severed on Shabbos without a brachah to avoid public embarrassment (kevod ha-briyos) — Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if the man already prayed privately with borrowed kosher tefillin and now comes to shul to hear Kaddish, Kedushah, and Krias HaTorah, he is permitted to wear his empty tefillin housings so as not to suffer mortification, provided his intent is solely to avoid embarrassment rather than to falsely pretend to be pious.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 315

Chaim's father was very severely wounded in one of Israel's wars. Due to his injuries, he lost both of his arms. Chaim would come to his father's apartment daily to care for him and ensure he ate and was taken care of. One day Chaim slept over at his father's apartment and for some reason was unable to go to shul for Shacharis. He planned to daven in his father's home. He took out his tefillin to begin davening but hesitated. His father was unable to put on tefillin because of his injuries. Would it be disrespectful to put on tefillin in front of his father if his father is unable to do it himself? Chaim thought to himself that we have a similar precedent when it comes to wearing tzitzis in a cemetery. One is not permitted to wear their tzitzis outside of his clothing at a cemetery. It is seen as mocking the dead, who cannot put on tzitzis and cannot do the mitzvah. Perhaps Chaim is not allowed to do the mitzvah of tefillin in front of

his father, who cannot do it? But on the other hand, perhaps one can argue that the father gets joy when his son performs the mitzvah. Therefore, perhaps it is not a problem at all to put on tefillin in front of him. This question was brought before Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about wearing the tefillin, Rav Zilberstein wrote that this case is different than the case of lo'eg la'rosh, of not wearing tzitzis in the cemetery. This is because the father can participate in the mitzvah of wearing tefillin by learning Torah about tefillin. For him, learning Torah about tefillin is as if he is wearing the tefillin. Or he can chip in to buy someone tefillin, and that gives him a part of the mitzvah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 152

Elchonon lived in a small Jewish community. One day he brought his tefillin to the local sofer for them to get checked. The sofer inspected the tefillin and sure enough he discovered that there was a p'sul in the batim which rendered the tefillin unfit to be used. It would require some work to be done to restore its kashrus. Elchonon did not have a replacement tefillin. The next day he went to shul and brought with him the pasul tefillin that he used every day. He asked his friend who sat next to him if he could borrow his tefillin after he was done with them. The friend of course obliged. They began to daven and Elchonon was embarrassed to daven with the minyan without tefillin. In order not to stand out he began to put on his passul tefillin. He did not intend to make a berachah on them, because they were pasul, but he wanted to wear them because he was ashamed not to. As he put them on he had the following thought. He was putting on the pasul tefillin as a show. He was only wearing them to avoid standing out. Was it okay to put on pasul tefillin for show? On one hand one can say that if it prevents him from being embarrassed, it should be okay. But on the other hand, is it okay to pretend to wear tefillin? Is it ok to wear pasul tefillin just for appearances?

Answer: Regarding the question about the tefillin, we have to make a correction. The case that Rav Zilberstein cited was where the parshios were removed because they were found to be passul. In that case Rav Zilberstein answered that if one is concerned that it will appear that he is "mezalzel in the mitzvah of tefillin" if he davens without wearing them, then he may wear tefillin without the parshios inside. However if his intention is to appear to be pious, and appear to be a "medakdek in tefillin", he is not allowed to wear tefillin without the parshios.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 315

Avi was once visiting San Diego, California. They have an amazing zoo there, as well as a beautiful Sea World. San Diego is close to the Mexican city of Tijuana, and Avi decided that he would like to visit the Mexican border city. After crossing the border, Avi made his way to an outdoor market. He came to a shop that sold assorted second-hand items like used candelabras, used watches, used pillows, and used pots. After perusing the store, Avi's eyes rested on what looked like a bag of tefillin. The tefillin were lying haphazardly on the floor. Pointing to the tefillin bag, Avi asked the owner, "sir, where did you get that bag from." The man was evasive. He said, "I have my ways. That is not your concern." Avi's sixth sense told him that something was off. Avi asked the man if he could look at the tefillin. The man passed it to him. Avi asked if he could try them on. The man shrugged. Avi put the tefillin on his hand and then on his head. Wearing both, Avi asked, "how much do you want for these?" The man sensed that Avi wanted them eagerly and asked for a high price. Avi did not have a lot of money on him, but he did not want the tefillin to remain in this shopkeeper's possession. He had an idea. Pointing to his unadorned right hand, Avi asked the man, "tell me, where is the other one for the right hand?" The owner said he had them in the back. The man went to the back to search for the other tefillin but came back empty-handed. "I could have sworn there was another one, but this is what I have now," he said. So Avi said, "Listen, if you don't have the other one, then this is defective. I will give you 20 dollars for these." The man, realizing that he had a defective set of tefillin, agreed to settle on the price of 20 dollars. Avi walked out of the store,

happy that he had rescued the tefillin from a state of disrespect. But then Avi had second thoughts. He knew that tefillin did not have another one for the right hand. So he really tricked the man into giving it for a very low price. Did he do the wrong thing? On the one hand, the man himself was sure that there was another one, and in his opinion, it was defective. But on the other hand, by Avi asking about the other one, he led the shopkeeper on to tell him that he had another part. Avi had another question: Was he allowed to keep the tefillin? Perhaps they were stolen from a Jew in Tijuana, and perhaps Avi had a responsibility to try to make an effort to locate the owner. Avi had a third question. Was he allowed to use them to make a berachah on them? Even if he gets them checked and sees that they are in good order, he doesn't know who created the tefillin. Perhaps a non-Jew or someone not fit to make tefillin made them. These questions were presented to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the tefillin found by a shady merchant, Rabbi Zilberstein wrote that the tefillin can be presumed to be stolen, and therefore he was allowed to do what he did to rescue the tefillin from someone who does not own it. Regarding the question of whether they can be worn because we don't know who wrote them, Rav Zilberstein answered that if it is checked by an expert and they are found to be kosher, we can assume that a Jew made the tefillin. Regarding whether the tefillin can be kept, Rav Zilberstein wrote that he should put notices in the local shuls that tefillin were found, and in the meantime, the finder can use the tefillin.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 149

In Antwerp, there was once a series of anti-Semitic vandalism of synagogues. Vandals broke into synagogues and desecrated the Sifrei Torah, the Torah books and other holy items. The police wanted to try to apprehend the criminals who vandalized the shuls. They decided to embed undercover police within the shul community to blend in and to see if they can catch the culprits. The undercover police wanted to dress like Chasidic Jews and embed themselves into the shul population. The non-Jewish police asked some of the shul members if they can borrow tefillin to wear in order for their cover to look authentic. The shul members discussed among themselves whether it was permitted to give the undercover police the tefillin to wear for this purpose. On one hand non-Jews who are not commanded to wear tefillin normally do not wear tefillin. But on the other hand perhaps doing this can help prevent a desecration of further holy items as well as catch these potentially dangerous vandals. What would you answer them? Can they give the undercover police the tefillin to wear just for this purpose?

Answer: Regarding the question about whether a man could leave his Tefillin behind, Rav Elyashiv answered that all the people in the city in Russia were considered anusim (prevented by circumstances beyond their control) and therefore were exempt from the mitzvah of Tefillin entirely. However, this man, who had Tefillin and could put them on, was not an oneis and was obligated. Therefore, he would not be permitted to leave his Tefillin behind, since the others actually did not have an obligation.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Four, Hebrew Edition p. 105 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 036 (Eikev)

During the Nazi occupation of the Kovno Ghetto, all Jewish adults were forced to march to slave labor assignments before daybreak, preventing many from donning tefillin in their proper halachic time. One morning, a Jewish laborer attempted to put on his tefillin along the way. A German officer discovered him, beat him savagely, and carved a deep crucifix into the flesh of his left arm where the tefillin shel yad is positioned, intending to ensure he would never wear tefillin again. After recovering from his injuries, the man approached Rabbi Ephraim Oshry with an agonizing

question: Tefillin must be placed directly upon the arm without any interposition (chatzitzah). May he don his holy tefillin directly upon his arm over the scarred crucifix, or would placing the sacred Name of Hashem atop an idolatrous symbol constitute a desecration? Should he instead wear the tefillin on his right arm, or place them over a sleeve?

Answer: Rav Ephraim Oshry advised that ideally, following the pious custom of wearing tefillin from home to the synagogue, the man should put on his tefillin in the privacy of his home—where no stranger would see the crucifix scar on his arm—before walking to shul, and keep the shel yad covered under his sleeve until he returned home. However, if doing so was too difficult for him, Rav Oshry ruled that in such pressing circumstances he may rely on the lenient authorities (Rashi and Tosafos, Arachin 3b; Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 27:4; Shu"t Oneg Yom Tov, Orach Chaim 8) who hold that an interposition (chatzitzah) does not invalidate the shel yad so long as the tefillin are covered from view ('lecha le-os'). Therefore, he may place the shel yad over a thin bandage or thin shirt sleeve covering the scar without reciting a berachah on the shel yad, and then recite both blessings ('lehaniach tefillin' and 'al mitzvas tefillin') when placing the shel rosh directly on his head (citing Maharsham, Orach Chaim 27).

— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 1, Siman 26

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar recounted in the name of Rabbi Meir: An incident occurred involving a woman who was married to a Torah scholar (chaver) and used to lovingly fasten the Tefillin straps upon his arm every morning. After her husband passed away, she married a customs tax collector, and under his influence she instead began fastening tax-receipt seals upon his hand!

Bechoros 30b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The 85 year old Rav Michel Prager was very attached to the mitzvah of tefillin. He never had them checked because he did not want them to get ruined. One day someone accidentally switched tefillin with him and brought the tefillin to be checked. The sofer discovered that a whole word was missing. At first the man who brought it in was upset, but then realized it wasn't his tefillin. Now they had the difficult task of telling Rav Michel the news that he had never fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin in his entire life. His friends approached him slowly in shul. They had a doctor available in case. They told him the story, gently. R' Michel suddenly smiled, then laughed then he began to dance and sing. They thought maybe he lost it. They asked him why he wasn't upset. He said do you know what this means? Had my tefillin never been checked, I would have gone my whole life not wearing the precious mitzvah of tefillin. But now that you discovered it, I can now do the mitzvah. I am so grateful for this opportunity. He then asked for a kosher pair to be brought for him as soon as possible, and joyfully and tearfully, for the first time he made a berachah on the tefillin.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 205

❖ Rav Yaakov Galinsky didn't only give mussar to the Lithuanians, he took it from them as well. In his way, as he was educated to do, he viewed every incident in his life as a mussar lesson. One of the Lithuanian prisoners, a distinguished man in his past life, gave Yaakov a lesson he never forgot. Every morning, Yaakov noticed that one of the men got up from his bunk and crept stealthily to a corner of the room. What could cause him to wake up extra early? Work started at six, and from six in the morning until six at night the guards worked them like animals, not human beings. At night, they collapsed on their bunks. Every minute of rest was important. So why would this man be getting up early? It certainly wasn't to put on tefillin before sunrise or to learn before davening. Yaakov watched as the man surreptitiously removed several items from a secret hiding place: a small work satchel. What did he have in there? And why was he guarding it so closely? All questions were answered when the man removed an army uniform. He put it on, with its ribbons and medals, and before

Yaakov's startled eyes, stood tall in the full dress uniform of a Lithuanian general. In a hoarse whisper, the man barked orders, saluted, and performed several unusual movements. When the wake-up bell rang, he quickly removed the uniform, stuffed it back into the satchel, and returned the satchel to its hiding place. Yaakov couldn't contain his curiosity. He went over to the man and asked him, "What was that all about?" The man shot him a fierce look. "What are you talking about?" "What I saw just now." The man's eyes opened wide with fear. "What did you see?" "You put on an army uniform, you walked around the barracks, you talked to yourself. What was going on? What was so important to you that you were willing to lose an hour's sleep?" "I'll tell you, young man," he said in a softer tone. "I used to be a general. I've fought many battles and was crowned with glory. I was on top of the world. Was there anyone else like me? Who was as lauded a hero as I? Then those miserable Russians came and tore me away from my army. They sent me here into exile, to this miserable hole, and they're doing everything they can to turn me into a wretched prisoner, so that I'll forget my former glory. "But I don't intend to forget! I will never forget that I was once a powerful general, that I courageously led my troops into battle, that I conquered land, that tens of thousands obeyed my orders, that the world honored me and I was treated like royalty. That's why I get up early, put on my full dress uniform with all its medals, and act out a series of salutes and military exercises. I don't want to ever forget who I once was." Yaakov was excited by the message and told his friends, "Look to what extent he's willing to go so as not to forget that he was a general. How much more must we strive to never forget that we are children of the King!" For the prisoners, each new day was like the one before it, but the outside world was in the throes of upheaval. Germany had made a surprise attack on Russia, violating the non-aggression pact they'd signed only two years earlier. Stalin sought help from the Allies, and as part of that military alliance he agreed to release all Polish prisoners held in Soviet labor camps. On 19 Av 5701/August 12, 1941, their freedom was granted. Russia was to provide them with living quarters on Soviet kolkhozy until they could be repatriated. How long that would take was anyone's guess. It all depended on when—and if—Russia, along with the newly regrouped Polish army, and the Allies defeated Nazi Germany.

From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, By Rebetzin G. Lehrer, Published by Feldheim

❖ Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus had a remarkable way of guiding his talmidim to achieve personal and spiritual growth and pointing out flaws and traits that warranted improvement without sounding angry, reproachful, or condescending. There were two roommates in yeshivah, one who regularly rose on time for davening and the other who fought a daily battle with his alarm clock. Intuiting that reprimanding and rebuking the second bachur was fruitless, Rav Shimshon resorted to another tactic. "You don't get up because it's hard to get up?" he asked sympathetically. The bachur acknowledged this with a relieved nod, and Rav Shimshon continued. "I won't argue the point, but please go call your roommate, because I want to ask him something." When the roommate appeared, Rav Shimshon requested that he take responsibility to ensure that his friend was up every morning on time. "But please don't wake him up with thunder and lightning! Rav Shimshon added. "Let him fall back asleep. I just ask of you one thing, and I take full responsibility for the consequences. Make sure you don't leave your room to the beis midrash until he's out of bed. Stay in the room. If it starts getting late, put on tefillin, and if he's still in bed, say Pesukei d'Zimrah and wait until he gets up. You don't have to shake him or pour cold water on him to get him up have to do is let him know, I'm up!' and then wait for him to get up on his own." The next morning, the roommate announced that he was up and waited... and waited... He donned tefillin and sat down on his bed, waiting patiently to see how long it would take. Discomforted by the knowledge that his roommate was anxiously waiting for him and would soon be late, despite having never missed a davening in the lethargic bachur got out of bed. From then on, he rose regularly for davening!

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

❖ The great chassidic master, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, regularly used Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, and his students were therefore perplexed when he abruptly discontinued this practice for a period of time. When he later resumed the use of Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, he explained to his students: "One day I was unusually exhausted, having been besieged all day by supplicants with a myriad of problems. I barely had time to eat, because I had not devoted enough time to Torah study that

day. I finally went to sleep at 3 A.M. and no sooner had I fallen asleep than I was woken by a loud knocking at the door. A man had come to plead with me to pray for his daughter, who was having a difficult labor, and the midwife was in doubt whether either the mother or infant would survive. I was initially upset, because I was extremely weary after so difficult a day, and here I could not even get the few moments of sleep that I needed so desperately. Nevertheless, I gave the man my blessing, and then began to recite Tehillim (Psalms) to pray for the young woman. "As I returned to bed, I began thinking, 'If that young woman were my own daughter who was in mortal danger, and someone had alerted me to this so that I would pray for her, would I have been irritated with this person? Of course not! To the contrary, I would have been most grateful to have been notified, so that I could pray for her.' In other words, I was discriminating between my daughter and someone else's daughter. That is hardly being spiritual. I therefore decided that I was not deserving of putting on Rabbeinu Tam tefillin. "

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ When the Nazis deported the Jews of their town to Auschwitz, brothers Mendel and Moshe vowed to risk their lives to put on tefillin every day. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, their tefillin were confiscated and tossed into a storage shed where the Germans hoarded Jewish ritual items. Mendel approached a non-Jewish camp worker and offered a full day's starvation ration of bread and watery soup for a pair of tefillin from the shed. When the worker brought two tefillin shel yad (arm boxes) by mistake, Mendel gave up a second consecutive day's rations to obtain a proper shel rosh as well. Secretly, up to fifty inmates a day risked death to put on Mendel and Moshe's tefillin. When a kapo confiscated that pair, Mendel stood by the barbed-wire fence as a new transport arrived and pleaded with an elderly deportee to entrust his tefillin to him before the guards seized them. One day, however, a Nazi burst into the barracks while an inmate was wearing the tefillin. Enraged, the officer asked who owned them, and Mendel stepped forward. "Killing you is too easy," the Nazi sneered, tossing the tefillin back to him. "This afternoon, the entire block will assemble around a bonfire, and you will throw your precious treasure into the flames yourself!" While his barracks-mates wept, Mendel calmly pried up a floorboard beneath his bunk and pulled out a pair of painted dummy wooden boxes he had secretly whittled weeks earlier for just such an emergency. That afternoon, before the mocking SS guards, Mendel cast the empty decoys into the fire—and the very next morning, the Jews of the barracks put on the real tefillin once again. In the final days of the war in 1945, the Nazis halted all rations and Mendel lay on his bunk near death from starvation. Spotting a lump of sugar fall from a German wagon, Moshe snatched it up, traded it for a few slices of bread, and pressed the crumbs into his dying brother's mouth. Swallowing with difficulty, Mendel opened his eyes and whispered into Moshe's ear: "Moshe, please bring me the tefillin—I haven't worn them yet today." The very next day, Allied troops liberated the camp, and Mendel and Moshe carried those sacred tefillin with them to America.

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Moshe and Chaim Lechovitz watched from the forest as their entire village was killed. They were able to escape into the woods and were able to join up with the partisans. All they brought with them was a pair of tefillin. They were careful to put on tefillin every day, and it was their strongest connection to Yiddishkeit. They were made fun of by the partisans but it didn't stop them. One morning as they were about to put on their tefillin, they heard German troop movement from the west. They ran back to the group and they all realized that it was a German assault. They all ran into the opposite direction to the west. As they were escaping Moshe and Chaim realized that they left their tefillin. Against the wishes of the group they went back, thinking that they were running into the hands of the Germans. They got their tefillin and went back. They came across the whole group slaughtered. The Germans laid an ambush, pretending to come from the east when they were really planning to come from the other direction. The partisans ran right into their ambush and all were killed. They were saved because they went to get their tefillin. They didn't waste any time and put them on.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 296

❖ The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Schechter, once arrived at the airport to catch a flight, and realized he didn't have his tefillin with him. The talmid who accompanied him recounts: "I called the Yeshiva office and made an urgent request for someone to deliver the tefillin to JFK, and then suggested that meanwhile, perhaps the Rosh Hayeshiva wanted to check in, because waiting to do so until the tefillin arrived would risk missing the flight. The Rosh Hayeshiva insisted he would wait outside until the person arrived. And he explained, 'We say, Hoda'ah has to be expressed directly, personally. Someone is schlepping from Flatbush to the airport with my tefillin, and that means I have to greet him in person and thank him."

From Rav Aharon Schechter Tribute / Table Talk Anthology

❖ Realizing that he'd left his tefillin at his host's house, Rav Bogen asked to be let off the plane. The cabin crew told him it was too late as they had already locked the doors. Politely and firmly, he threatened to take legal action if they did not let him off. He picked up his tefillin and was headed back to the airport when he heard the news that... his plane was the one that crashed into the second tower on 9/11.

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ "When a student's first child was born eleven weeks prematurely and had to have emergency surgery, Reb Mendel Kaplan gave him strength to cope with the situation. As soon as he heard what was happening, he came immediately and stayed throughout the entire operation. Amazingly, he arrived still wearing his tefillin! He had gotten the message during Shacharis and didn't want to delay the extra few minutes it would have taken to remove them."

Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Klausenberger Rebbe always tried to be assigned to the night shift. Even when he was assigned to the day shift, he switched with other prisoners so that he could work at night. Even though the night shift was much more strenuous, and freezing cold, the Rebbe preferred to spend the day hours in the camp so that he could don his tefillin at the right time. He would spend hours alone in his barracks, praying without disturbance.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press

A. NOT TO SPEAK IN BETWEEN THE PLACING OF BOTH TEFILLIN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-10

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One is strictly forbidden to make any interruption (hefsek) between donning the hand-tefillin (tefillin shel yad) and the head-tefillin (tefillin shel rosh); one must not speak or pause even to respond to Kaddish or Kedushah.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Why was he called 'Elisha Master of Wings' (Ba'al Kenafayim)? Because once the wicked Roman Empire decreed a persecution against Israel that whoever puts Tefillin upon his head would have his skull pierced. Even so, Elisha would put on his Tefillin and go out into the marketplace. A Roman officer (quaestor) spotted him; Elisha ran before him, and the officer pursued him. When the officer caught up to him, Elisha removed the Tefillin from his head and held them tightly in his hand. The officer demanded: 'What is that in your hand?' Elisha answered: 'The wings of a dove!' When he opened his

hand, two dove's wings were found inside! And why did he say 'the wings of a dove' rather than any other bird? Because the Congregation of Israel is compared to a dove: just as a dove's wings protect it when it is weary, so too the mitzvos protect Israel.

Shabbos 49a (and 130a)

❖ The Sages taught that one does not purchase Torah scrolls, Tefillin, or Mezuzos written by a gentile. Yet they cited an incident in Sidon involving a gentile who was selling Tefillin, Torah scrolls, and Mezuzos, and when the case came before the Sages they permitted buying from him! Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman explained in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Why was that case in Sidon permitted? Because that scribe had converted and returned to the faith of his youth, writing the sacred scrolls with full fidelity to the covenant!

Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah 2:2 (and Gittin 4:6)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Avraham Dovid Weisz shlit'a (referenced in Rabbi Diskind's dvar Torah) has been living with ALS for 15 years. A few months ago he developed an infection in his lungs and went to his medical staff at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan for an evaluation. After scanning his infection his doctors recognized that there was no hope for clearing the infection and advised the family to place Reb Avraham David into hospice care. The family was not about to give up nor was Reb Avraham Dovid. They decided to go Mass General Hospital in Boston where the doctors were familiar with Reb Avraham Dovid and his case. The doctors at Mass General agreed to do their best to save Reb Avraham Dovid from the infection. After undergoing a long and enduring procedure the doctors felt that they were successful and sent him back home to Monsey. They were planning on leaving Boston at 10:00 in the morning. Everyday, after Shacharis Reb Avraham Dovid puts on his Rabbeinu Tam tefillin. Given that they were leaving Boston at 10:00 that morning, his family figured that to expedite their trip he would put on his Rabbeinu Tam tefillin upon their return to Monsey. Unfortunately they were not able to depart from Boston at 10:00. It was only at 2:00 that he and his wife and close friend began their return to Monsey. In the transport ambulance, at about 4:00, Reb Avraham Dovid's heart rate began rising. Mrs. Weisz asked her husband, using their transparent Alef Beis sheet, if there was something bothering him. He told her that they would not make it back to Monsey before sundown. Once the sun goes down you cannot put on the tefillin and he was afraid that he would lose out on the opportunity of wearing Rabbeinu Tam tefillin that day. Mrs Weisz told her husband that it is okay to skip one day without Rabbeinu Tam tefillin. Her husband's heart rate sharply increased and she asked what the problem was. He responded to her "Just today Hashem performed a miracle that saved my life and just today I will miss wearing my Rabbeinu Tam tefillin?! Upon hearing that response Mrs. Weisz called her son in Monsey and he guided Reb Avraham Dovid's friend over the phone on how Reb Avraham Dovid ties his Rabbeinu Tam tefillin. After the tefillin were on, Reb Avraham Dovid's heart returned to normal.

As told by the family of the protagonists to Rabbi Paysach Diskind

2. To Put on Head Tefillin

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 9

As the Torah says, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes (Devarim 6:8, Parshas Va'eschanan).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Where do we place the tefillin between our eyes?
- What are inside the tefillin?
- What are the tefillin to remind us about?
- Is there a difference between how the parshios are written in the head tefillin and the hand tefillin?
- What are the consequences of not putting on kosher tefillin?
- While one is wearing tefillin, what should one be careful about regarding his body?
- When one say's shema in the morning, does he have to be wearing tefillin?
- What is the consequence of making sure you have a pure body when you wear the tefillin?
- Why is it important to periodically touch the tefillin?
- What else should one avoid while wearing tefillin?
- What demeanor should one have while wearing tefillin?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The halachic placement for the head-tefillin (tefillin shel rosh) is upon the crown of the head, centered directly above the hairline at the cranial fontanelle — the precise anatomical spot where an infant's skull is soft.

Within the tefillin, four specific scriptural passages from the Torah are transcribed upon parchment by an ordained scribe: Kadesh Li Chol Bechor (Shemos 13:1–10), V'hayah Ki Yevi'acha (Shemos 13:11–16), the Shema (Devarim 6:4–9), and V'hayah Im Shamoa (Devarim 11:13–21).

These four sacred passages encapsulate foundational pillars of Jewish faith:

The sovereign acceptance of the yoke of Heaven's kingdom (ol Malchus Shamayim) and the affirmation of Hashem's absolute Oneness;

The enduring remembrance of the supernatural miracles and wonders that Hashem performed for our ancestors when He delivered them from Egypt;

And the profound realization that He drew us close to His sacred service, worship, and reverence — blessed be His Name.

In the hand-tefillin (tefillin shel yad), these four scriptural passages are inscribed upon a single continuous parchment scroll placed inside one unified compartment. In the head-tefillin (tefillin shel rosh), they are transcribed onto four separate scrolls housed within four distinct, narrow compartments.

Whoever fails to don tefillin actively violates eight biblical positive commandments every day, because the four scriptural passages in the hand-tefillin and the four passages in the head-tefillin each constitute an autonomous positive commandment in their own right.

Tefillin strictly require a clean body (guf naki), meaning that one must be meticulously vigilant never to pass gas or release bodily odors for the entire duration that they remain upon him.

Whoever recites the Shema without wearing tefillin is regarded by Chazal as though he bears false witness against himself (Berachos 14b), for he proclaims the divine command to bind them as a sign upon his arm and head while neglecting to observe it himself.

Whoever is habitual and meticulous in wearing tefillin with a pure and clean body merits long life, as Scripture states: 'O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit' (Yeshayahu 38:16; cf. Rashi, Menachos 44b).

A person is obligated to touch his tefillin periodically throughout the entire time he is wearing them — first touching the hand-tefillin and then the head-tefillin — so that his mind does not wander from awareness of them for even a single moment, for their holiness is exceedingly exalted.

For as long as the tefillin remain bound upon his arm and resting upon his head, a person is obligated to conduct himself in a state of:

Profound humility and genuine awe of Heaven (yiras Shamayim);

He must not be drawn into frivolity, lightheadedness, mockery, or idle chatter;

Nor may he harbor unwholesome thoughts or unworthy desires, but must direct his heart entirely toward words of divine truth.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was the first Erev Yom Kippur in Bergen-Belsen. Rivka Horowitz, always energetic and bursting with ideas, had a plan. She somehow obtained two portable sewing machines and made Eda Laufer (now Rebbetzin Piekarsky) and her friend, Sarah Bodner (later Mintz), sew yarmulkes for the young men. The waiting lines were dauntingly long, Eda remembers: "We had to eat our Erev Yom Kippur meals at the machines. But scores of young men went to services that night wearing yarmulkes for the first time since the war." That was the girls' greatest reward.

Carry Me in Your Heart, By Pearl Benisch, p. 346

A. TO FEEL THE TEFILLIN PERIODICALLY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-20

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the purpose of feeling the Tefillin?
- Which has more holiness the tefillin or the tzitz worn by the kohen gadol?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught in the third chapter of Menachos (36b) that a person is obligated to touch his tefillin periodically throughout the entire time they are upon him, ensuring that his conscious awareness does not drift from them for even a single moment. Chazal derive this requirement through an a fortiori deduction (kal vachomer) from the High Priest's golden forehead-plate (tzitz): If the tzitz, which bears only a single inscription of Hashem's Holy Name, requires constant mental presence — as Scripture commands, 'And it shall be upon his forehead always' (Shemos 28:38), meaning his mind must never wander from it — then tefillin, which contain dozens of sacred occurrences of Hashem's Divine Name, certainly mandate that one maintain continuous, reverent awareness of them.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred when Rabbi Eliezer traveled to Ublin to visit a certain householder, where it was customary to bathe in a natural spring-cave. Rabbi Eliezer removed his garments and removed his Tefillin to enter the first cave-pool. His host said to him: 'My Master, the waters of this adjacent cave-pool are much clearer and finer than those of this one!' Even though there were fewer than four cubits between the first cave entrance and the second, Rabbi Eliezer dressed himself and put his Tefillin back on before walking those few steps from one pool to the other, for Rabbi Eliezer never walked four cubits without Tefillin!

Maseches Tefillin 1:19

B. TO THINK ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE SYMBOLIC MITZVOS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-44

SEFER CHAREIDIM

After Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu regarding circumcision, 'You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin,' He reiterated: 'And it shall be as a sign of the covenant between Me and you' (Bereishis 17:11). This represents an enduring duty of the heart: every day, a person must reflect upon the truth that he is a consecrated servant permanently marked with the seal of the Sovereign of the universe. He must never rebel against Hashem or conduct himself as though he were free of divine authority. This reflects universal human custom, where a master places his emblem upon his servant so that the servant maintains constant reverence for him (Shabbos 58a). The Almighty placed this sign upon that specific anatomical organ because the Holy One, blessed be He, is holy and detests promiscuity; beholding this covenantal seal instills awe, restraining a person from succumbing to illicit desires.

The Almighty likewise endowed us with a second covenantal seal: the sacred tefillin, as Scripture states, 'And it shall be for a sign upon your hand' (Shemos 13:9). On Shabbos, when we do not don tefillin, Shabbos itself serves as the divine sign, as Scripture declares, 'Between Me and Bnei Yisroel it is an eternal sign' (Shemos 31:17); all the biblical festivals are likewise categorized under the sanctity of Shabbos. Consequently, a Jewish man is never accompanied by fewer than two testifying signs at any time — fulfilling the scriptural principle, 'By the mouth of two witnesses... a matter shall be established' (Devarim 19:15), as explained by the Semag (Sefer Mitzvos Gadol)

The mitzvah of tzitzis commanded by the Almighty serves as a profound symbol of the celestial strap of judgment (retzu'ah d'dina). A person must never rationalize that because the Holy One, blessed be He, is merciful, he may sin with impunity without facing accountability. The four tzitzis tassels correspond to the four judicial forms of capital punishment administered by the court (arba misos beis din). Although formal judicial execution by the Sanhedrin was discontinued, the Almighty continues to administer equitable retribution in this world corresponding to those four capital penalties.

Furthermore, the four corner tassels of tzitzis symbolize the four severe judgments prophesied in the Book of Yechezkel: the sword, famine, predatory beasts, and pestilence (Yechezkel 14:21).

The eight threads on each corner awaken the heart of an unrepentant individual who prospers in this world without experiencing physical tribulations, reminding him that he remains destined to face accountability in Gehinnom. The seven white threads represent the seven ascending levels of fire in Gehinnom. The eighth thread of techeiles (sky-blue wool) alludes to the angel of destruction appointed over Gehinnom, commanding myriads of punitive angels who execute divine justice against the wicked, as taught in the Zohar. Furthermore, the four corners contain thirty-two individual threads, which, when combined with the four corner tassels themselves, total thirty-six. This number thirty-six corresponds to the thirty-six cardinal biblical transgressions punishable by celestial excision (kares; Kerisos 2a). The Prophet Yirmiyahu lamented this tragedy in Megillas Eichah, opening his lamentation with the word Eichah — whose letters possess the numerical equivalent (gematria) of thirty-six — revealing that the devastation of the Temple was brought about because the people violated the thirty-six prohibitions of kares enumerated in the Torah.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ A gentile official asked Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai: 'These rituals that you perform with the Red Heifer look like sorcery! You bring a cow, burn it, crush its ashes, and when one of you becomes impure from a corpse, you sprinkle two or three drops of water on him and declare: You are pure!' Rabban Yochanan asked him: 'Has a restless spirit (ruach tezazis) ever entered a person in your city?' 'Yes,' said the official. 'And what do you do for him?' 'We bring medicinal roots, burn them underneath him, splash water over him, and the spirit flees.' Rabban Yochanan said: 'Let your ears hear what your mouth just spoke! The spirit of impurity is just like that spirit — we sprinkle the waters of purification upon him and it flees.' After the official left, Rabban Yochanan's disciples said to him: 'Master! You pushed that man off with a fragile reed — what explanation will you give to us?' Rabban Yochanan answered them: 'By your lives! Neither does the corpse itself have any magical power to defile, nor does the water have any magical power to purify! Rather, the Holy One, Blessed be He, declared: I have legislated a statute (chok), I have issued a decree (gezeirah), and you have no permission to transgress My decree — as it says, This is the statute of the Torah!'

Bamidbar Rabbah 19:8

MEZUZAH: SANCTIFYING THE HOME

3. To Place a Mezuzah on One's Doorposts

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 12 Sefer Chareidim 16-21

As the Torah says And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Devarim 6:9, Parshas Va'eschanan).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is inside the mezuzah case?
- What is it supposed to remind us of?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Within the mezuzah — a parchment scroll inscribed by an ordained scribe and encased upon the doorpost — two specific scriptural passages from the Torah are written: the Shema (Devarim 6:4–9) and V'hayah Im Shamoa (Devarim 11:13–21).

A person is obligated to be meticulously vigilant concerning the mitzvah of mezuzah, so that every time he enters or exits his home, he encounters the declaration of Hashem's absolute Oneness inscribed within it. This reminder awakens his love for the Creator, rousing him from his slumber and from his immersion in the fleeting, hollow pursuits of mundane life. He recognizes that nothing endures for all eternity except the true knowledge of the eternal Rock of the universe, prompting him to instantly regain his spiritual equilibrium and walk in upright, virtuous paths.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

Mezuzah is to our home what Tefillin are to our body. Just as Tefillin express our resolve to dedicate every aspect of our body to serve Hashem, a mezuzah expresses our resolve to dedicate our homes and communities to become places of serving Hashem. When we place a mezuzah on our home, we express that we dedicate this home to be a place devoted to singularly to coming close to Hashem by perfecting our character through Torah and mitzvos. This in turn fills us with a hashpa, an influence that indeed helps us to perfect our character and so come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 426)

The mezuzah is a reminder about Hashem and our responsibility to keep the Torah.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Just as the tefillin dedicate our actions, emotions and thought to Hashem, the mezuzah is a reminder to dedicate our homes to serve Hashem. We also see it when we leave our homes to remind us to keep the Torah wherever we go to.

ABARBANEL

Just as there are gates to an individual home, so are there gates at the border of a country. The mezuzah reminds us of the gates of Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish national homeland, the great gift given to us by Hashem.

ALSHICH

The mezuzah reminds us that even in private, when mans thinks he is all alone, he must avoid sin because Hashem is watching.

SFAS EMES

• Korach's famous challenge provides one of the deepest teachings about Mezuzah. If the purpose of Mezuzah is to place Torah within the house, what could be more saturated with Torah than a home containing an entire library of holy books? The Sfas Emes answers by uncovering the flaw in Korach's entire argument. Korach said: "for the entire congregation are all holy." There was truth in the statement. Every Jew possesses holiness. But the Sfas Emes says: "there is holiness above holiness." Certain higher levels of kedushah enter the world through the particular structures Hashem commanded. The same mezuzah therefore appears on the home of the greatest talmid chacham and on the home of the simplest Jew. At the doorway, both submit to the same covenant (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5653).

• Chazal place the mezuzah on the right side of the person entering. The Sfas Emes sees this physical orientation as an expression of an entire hierarchy of values. He cites the pasuk: Length of days is in the Torah's right hand; wealth and honor are in its left. This is how a Jew should be ordered. Torah belongs to the right and must be the primary essence (ikar). Wealth and honor belong to the left and must remain secondary and subordinate (tafeil) to the soul. Torah belongs to what endures. The mezuzah therefore teaches the householder which side of life should govern the other (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5662).

• A major group of Mezuzah teachings in Ki Savo begins from the Midrash on the verse "Fortunate is the man who listens to Me, watching daily at My doors, waiting at the posts of My gates" (Mishlei 8:34): Chazal compare a person's relationship to the batei knessiyos and batei midrashos with a mezuzah that never moves from its doorway. The Sfas Emes asks an obvious question: Can a person literally spend his entire day inside the synagogue? The Sfas Emes explains that remaining attached to the Beis Midrash means preserving the orientation of avodas Hashem wherever one goes. He writes: A person should remember avodas Hashem at all times, and whatever passes before him should be examined for the way it can be brought into Divine service. The image of

the fixed mezuzah becomes a model for the inner life. Torah learned in the Beis Midrash must shape conversation, money, meals, family relationships, hospitality, and everyday decisions. The fixed point at the threshold reminds the person that movement through the world should never become movement away from Hashem (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5659).

• One of the most direct explanations given by the Sfas Emes begins with the unusual spiritual importance of an opening and doorway (pesach). The Torah says to Kayin, sin crouches at the entrance. The Sfas Emes understands this as a broader principle. Whenever a new opening is created, the forces of concealment also seek an opening. Whenever a new doorway opens, there is also a danger that the side of impurity (sitra achra), the force that obscures holiness, will attempt to enter there. The mezuzah guards the doorway because something precious lies beyond it. The purpose of the guard is to preserve the possibility of entering more deeply into holiness (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5636).

• The same Midrash produces another profound teaching. The Sfas Emes discusses a door within a door. Spiritual life contains successive openings. A person understands something, and a deeper chamber becomes visible. He reaches one level and discovers another beyond it. This creates a subtle danger. Spiritual achievement can produce arrogance (gasus). A person learns Torah, overcomes a weakness, experiences inspiration, or reaches a new level of understanding and begins to imagine that he has arrived. The Sfas Emes says: Even after achieving genuine understanding, a person must know clearly that he is still standing at the entrance. The doorway becomes the place of self-nullification (bittul). The closer a person moves toward inner spiritual essence (penimiyus), the more clearly he understands how much lies beyond him (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5636).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A homeowner removed all the Mezuzahs in his home to have them professionally inspected by a certified sofer. The front entrance doorpost was left bare. Should he affix an empty decorative mezuzah case to the front doorpost during the inspection period to prevent passersby from suspecting that a Jewish home lacks a mezuzah, or does displaying an empty case involve deception and mockery?

Answer: He should leave up an empty case to appear as if he has a Mezuzah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 442

The inmates of the Kovno Ghetto asked Rabbi Ephraim Oshry whether their overcrowded, forced dwellings in the ghetto were obligated in the mitzvah of Mezuzah. Because inmates were constantly subjected to sudden expulsions, selections, and transfers, and because the ghetto gates were locked from the outside by armed Nazi guards, are ghetto barracks considered temporary dwellings (diras aray) or prison quarters that are exempt from Mezuzah?

Answer: Rav Ephraim Oshry ruled that strictly speaking (min ha-din), the cramped, forced quarters of the Kovno Ghetto were exempt from the obligation of mezuzah. Citing the Rambam (Hilchos Mezuzah 6:1, 9) and the Birkei Yosef (Yoreh Deah 286:3), a dwelling requires a mezuzah only if it serves as a dignified residence (diras kavod) and a permanent dwelling (diras keva); since the ghetto inmates were condemned by the Nazis to death any day and viewed their quarters as a temporary death-row cell from which they yearned to escape at any moment, their rooms had the status of a temporary dwelling (diras

arai). Nevertheless, Rav Oshry ruled that anyone who possessed a kosher mezuzah fulfilled a great mitzvah by affixing it to his doorpost to invoke Divine protection (Menachos 43b; Shabbos 32b), provided he affixed it without reciting a berachah, while those who could not obtain a mezuzah had no reason to feel distressed.

— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 1, Siman 13

An individual purchased a lifetime deeded timeshare unit in a Florida resort hotel, granting him the contractual right to occupy the residence for exactly one specific week each year. Is he halachically obligated to affix a Mezuzah to the doorways of this timeshare unit? Does the thirty-day exemption for a temporary dwelling (diras arai) require thirty consecutive days, or do intermittent annual weeks aggregate over the years to obligate the dwelling?

Answer: Citing the Gevuras Ari (Yoma 10a) and Responsa Dovev Meisharim (Vol. 1, Siman 128), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein explains that because the owner holds a permanent lifetime deed to occupy the resort unit every single year, his multi-year occupancy combines to thirty days (or constitutes permanent ownership used seasonally, similar to the Kohen Gadol's Chamber of Parhedrin in Yoma 10a). Therefore, he should affix a mezuzah to the doorway (without a brachah, out of deference to the opinions that require thirty consecutive days outside Eretz Yisrael).

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 98

An architect designing a home planned several small storage alcoves and utility closets with dimensions less than four cubits by four cubits (less than roughly six feet by six feet). Is an architect or homeowner permitted to intentionally design rooms smaller than this minimum size to exempt them from a Mezuzah, or should one deliberately size them to obligate the space in a mitzvah?

Answer: He should ideally make the rooms large enough to be obligated in Mezuzah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Eruvin, p. 222

Akiva wanted to take his family on a weekend trip to Tzefas one summer. He went online to book an Airbnb for the weekend. He found an apartment that looked nice and contacted the owner, named Tzvi. Tzvi replied to Akiva that the particular apartment that he wanted was no longer available, but that he had just purchased and finished remodeling a new apartment that was not listed and that was available. Akiva expressed his interest and asked for pictures of the second apartment, and Tzvi sent them. The apartment looked perfect for their needs and Akiva agreed to rent the apartment for the weekend. Tzvi asked that they Paypal or Zelle him the money when they arrived at the apartment. Akiva and his family made their way to Tzfas. Traffic held them up and they got to the apartment 30 minutes before Shabbos. Akiva got out of the car and ran into the apartment. After looking around Akiva realized that there were no mezuzahs in the apartment. Akiva thought to himself, "I know I agreed to rent this apartment, but it's missing mezuzahs. It's owned by a Jew so he has an obligation to put up mezuzahs right away. I can't stay in an apartment that has an obligation to have mezuzahs, and is lacking them. The lack of a mezuzah should void our agreement, just like if the apartment was missing another essential feature like no roof or no bathroom." Akiva took the initiative and called an old friend of his who lived in Tzfas. Akiva told the friend about his predicament and the friend invited Akiva's family to stay with them. It would be tight but cozy. Akiva spent a wonderful Shabbos with his family at his friend's house. Right after Shabbos, Akiva gets a call from Tzvi. "Hi Akiva, I think you forgot to send over the money for the apartment rental, can you please do it now?" Akiva replied, "I will be honest with you, we never stayed at the apartment. We came there right before Shabbos, and saw that there were no mezuzahs on any of the doors. We were unable to spend Shabbos there so we went to a friend. I'm sorry but I'm not going to be able to pay you". Tzvi replied, "What do you mean?" You are exempt from a mezuzah because you planned on being there for less than thirty days and

this is like a hotel". Akiva replied, "Yes I may be exempt, but you are the owner and you have an obligation to put one on". But Tzvi replied, "No, if this is designated as a hotel where people stay for short durations it is completely exempt from a mezuzah". Akiva replied, "I was not aware of that detail, and it's possible that not everyone agrees to that. I am a simple Jew. As a matter of principle, I don't stay in an apartment that does not have a mezuzah, if it's owned by a Jew. I know that a home without a mezuzah is lacking important protection. I'm sorry I am unable to pay you". But Tzvi retorted, "I could have rented the apartment to someone else. You agreed to stay and now I lost the fare". They agreed to bring this question to a Rav. What do you think? Must Akiva pay the money for the rental, as he agreed, or can we say that the missing mezuzah invalidates their agreement because the rental was missing an essential feature?

Answer: Regarding the question about the vacation rental that did not have mezuzahs, this question was asked to Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l. Rav Chaim answered that "perhaps" the guest had to pay for the rental even though he did not stay because of the missing mezuzah. However Rav Chaim qualified this by saying that it is a "Tzarich Iyun". This is because there is a side to say that a Jew does not stay in a home without a mezuzah, even when there is no technical obligation because it does provide protection.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Eruvin, p. 109

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When Onkelos bar Kalonymus converted to Judaism, Caesar sent a cohort of Roman soldiers to arrest him; Onkelos drew them in with verses of Scripture, and they converted! Caesar sent a second cohort and warned them: 'Do not debate Scripture with him!' As they were leading him away, Onkelos told them: 'In the royal hierarchy, the torchbearer carries the light before the lector, the lector before the tribune, the tribune before the governor, and the governor before the supreme ruler—does the supreme ruler ever hold the torch before the people?' 'No!' they replied. Onkelos said: 'Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, held the pillar of fire before Israel in the wilderness!' And they too converted! Caesar sent a third cohort and ordered them: 'Do not speak a single word with him!' As they were taking him out of his house, Onkelos saw the Mezuzah on his doorway, placed his hand upon it, and smiled. They could not resist asking: 'What is that?' Onkelos replied: 'In the way of the world, a mortal king sits inside his palace while his servants stand outside guarding him; yet with the Holy One, blessed be He, His servants sleep peacefully inside their homes while He guards them from the doorway outside, as it is written: The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from now and forevermore!' And that third cohort converted as well, and Caesar sent no more soldiers after him.

Avodah Zarah 11a

❖ Artaban sent our holy Master, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, a priceless, peerless pearl and said to him: 'Send me in return something that is just as precious as this!' Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi sent him a single kosher Mezuzah. Artaban sent back word: 'What is this?! I sent you a jewel that is beyond price, and you sent me an item that costs a single small coin (follar) in the market!' Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi replied: 'My desirable things and your desirable things cannot be compared to the words of Torah—and what is more, you sent me something that I have to guard day and night, whereas I sent you something that guards you even while you sleep, as it is written: When you walk, it shall lead you; when you lie down, it shall watch over you!'

Talmud Yerushalmi, Peah 1:1 (4a)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Moshe Heinemann recently told Paysach Diskind the following story. In 1878 Reb Yehoshua Leib Diskin moved from Brisk and became the Rov of Yerushalayim. Due to persecution and disease there were a number of homeless children whom Reb Yehoshua Leib brought into his home. As the need increased he established an orphan home, today known as

the Diskin Orphanage. His second wife brought much money into their marriage which he used for the benefit of his orphanage. During his tenure as Rov he recognized that the people were not checking their mezuzos and started a campaign to do so. Unfortunately, most of the residents of Yerushalayim were greatly impoverished and they simply could not afford the cost to check their mezuzos. Rav Yehoshua Leib decided to use the funds of the orphanage to cover this cost. The directors of the orphanage, however, were not agreeable to use funds that were dedicated for the orphanage for this other project. Reb Yehoshua Leib told them that this project would directly benefit the orphanage and would actually save the orphanage lots of money. The Torah states that if we keep the mitzvah of mezuzah carefully it will extend our lives. "Let us check the people's mezuzos and lower the need for bringing more children into the orphanage" Reb Yehoshua Leib prevailed.

Table Talk, Edition 264 (Parshas Vayechi), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Rabbi Weiner was stopped in the hallway of the large apartment complex by an African-American woman. "Rabbi, could you please come up to my apartment to check the mezuzah?" Thinking he'd heard incorrectly, he asked the woman to repeat her request. "I know you think it's strange considering I'm not Jewish. But my Jewish friends told me if you put one of them mezuzahs on the doorpost, nothing bad can happen to you. They also told me it has to be checked by a rabbi twice in seven years." Rabbi Weiner unscrewed the mezuzah case, took it off the wall, and looked inside, but there was no parchment. "Uh, was there something in here when you bought it?" "Yes, there was. But I couldn't read the instructions, so I threw them away." COMMENT: This is a perfect metaphor for the current slate of Jewish affairs. Many have kept the external symbols of Judaism but have thrown away the instructions.

Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ Suffering several break-ins in a relatively short period of time, Wayne approached his Jewish friend and co-worker Josh to see if he could offer him any advice. Josh explained the concept of mezuzas and how they have protective properties. Wayne was interested, so Josh put a big mezuzah on his front doorpost. Two months later, Wayne walked over to Josh's desk and placed the mezuzah on it. "Didn't it work?" Josh asked. "Oh, it worked all right. I haven't had one break in. But now every night I'm inundated with black-hatted guys who are collecting for one thing or another. It's costing me a lot of money. I think it'll come out cheaper with the break-ins."

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

TZITZIS: THE ROYAL INSIGNIA OF HOLINESS

4. To Wear Tzitzis

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 10 Sefer Chareidim 16-13

As the Torah says, that they shall make themselves tassels on the corners of their garments (Bamidbar 15:38, Parshas Shelach)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Do pajamas need tzitzis?
- Does a cloth that is round on the bottom need tzitzis?
- Does a scarf need tzitzis?
- Which material does it have to be made of?
- Can you were a four cornered garment with only three kosher tzitzis?
- How old should a boy be to start wearing tzitzis?
- What is the purpose of wearing tzitzis?
- Are women obligated to wear tzitzis?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This obligation applies to any garment that a person wears during the daytime,

Provided that the garment possesses four or more distinct corners;

And provided that its dimensions are of sufficient size to cover both the head and the greater part of the body of a young child who can walk unaccompanied in the public thoroughfare without requiring supervision;

If the garment is fashioned from sheep's wool or linen, it is biblically obligated in tzitzis (ritual fringes) by the law of the Torah; garments crafted from other textiles or fabrics are obligated in tzitzis by rabbinic decree.

If an individual dons a four-cornered garment without affixing kosher tzitzis to its corners, he violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh).

A young boy who has reached the age of training (chinuch) and knows how to properly wrap himself in a garment — draping two tzitzis tassels in front of him and two behind him — is rabbinically obligated to wear tzitzis.

One must be exceedingly meticulous regarding the mitzvah of tzitzis, for the Torah equated it in weight and significance to all the commandments combined, linking them all to its observance: 'And you shall look upon it and remember all the commandments of Hashem, and perform them' (Bamidbar 15:39).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

The Torah says that tzitzis are meant to remind us to perform the mitzvos of Hashem, and not stray after our eyes and heart. When we wear the tzitzis, we are infused with an influence that indeed encourages us to observe the mitzvos, control our material impulses, so that we can perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RASHI (IBID.)

The 8 strings, 5 knots, and numerical value of the word tzitzis which is 600, all equal 613 the number of mitzvos in the Torah. The tzitzis are to be a reminder to always keep the mitzvos.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 386)

The blue string of the tzitzis symbolizes the sky and spirituality. The techeiles wrapped around the white string symbolizes our spirit, the neshamah dominating the body. It is a reminder for our neshamah to dominate our body and not the other way around.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The tzitzis sanctify our clothes. Originally the first man and woman wore clothing because of the shame of their transgression. The clothing that they wore was a symbol to remind them to subordinate and control the impulses of bodies. Tzitzis are a means to remind us to allow clothing to achieve its true purpose. Tzitzis means and symbolizes a blossom. The inner message of the clothing should blossom and bear fruit. That message is that "lo sasuru acharei eineichem" we should not stray after our eyes, like Adam and Chava did, rather we have to do what Hashem has told us.

KLI YAKAR

The blue thread reminds us of the ocean. The ocean has to stay within certain bounds. If it overruns its bounds the result can be catastrophic. A Jew also has to live within the bounds of the Torah because leaving them, can cause tragedy.

RAMBAN

The word techeilis is from the word kollel. This reminds us that Hashem should be our guiding light in all aspects of our lives.

OHR HACHAIM

The four cornered garment reminds a Jew that Hashem is the ruler over all corners of the earth.

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

The creation of the world is compared in Tehillim to a garment that covers and obscures Hashem. The strings of the tzitzis hanging down from our garment, symbolize a garment that is unfinished and not fully embroidered. This symbolizes that world which Hashem purposely left unfinished, so that we can do the mitzvos and help perfect the world in a moral way. They remind us that we are to do the mitzvos which help to complete and perfect the world.

In addition the strings and knots symbolize that we can connect every part of the material world to the spiritual world of heaven, by means of the mitzvos.

Tzitzis.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:6)

Tzitzis — Hashem wants every single aspect of a Jew to be kadosh and a means of coming close to Hashem, which will thereby perfect him. Therefore Hashem gave mitzvos for every time, and for every situation so that all things will be a tikun for him.

Part of man's objects are his clothes so Hashem wanted his clothes to be perfected with kedushah. Therefore Hashem made a mitzvah of Tzitzis to be mekadesh his clothes.

But there is also a deeper idea that lies behind the kedushah of tzitzis. Tzitzis is a sign for man that he is an eved of Hashem and this is the way that he accepts the ol of his mission to perfect the world and subordinate himself to Hashem. Only when you accept the ol of the mission will Hashem make your actions perfect the world. That is because of the following.

Yisrael has the mission, the ol to perfect the universe. He is thereby doing Hashem's avodah because Hashem's avodah is to bring humanity to its perfected state. But Hashem does things through the actions of those who do his mitzvos and learn Torah for Hashem's sake. Hashem will allow Man to indeed succeed in this mission of perfecting the universe as long as he is an eved Hashem and doing it for Hashem. In order for his actions to succeed in doing a tikun he has to be an eved Hashem with kabalas ol malchus shomaim, which is him accepting the mission to perfect the world. The ol is the mission to perfect the briah.

Kabalas ol malchus shamayim is strengthened through specific actions. One of them is the wearing of tzitzis. Tzitzis symbolizes that we are an eved Hashem and that we are mekabel ol malchus shomaim and subordinate ourselves to Hashem and accept the role of tikun habria. This helps us succeed in perfecting the bria.

Aside from the constant tikun of tzitzis, Chazal made it part of the tikunei tefillah for the man to put on the talis before he is mispallel and thereby be makabel the ol to bring tikun, and after he is mekabel the ol he can succeed in doing the tikun habria through the tefillah.

SFAS EMES

• Rashi explains the word tzitzis fringes (tzitzis) through the expression "peering through the lattices" (meitzitz min ha-charakim)—looking through an opening. The Sfas Emes takes this connection seriously. The mitzvah begins with "And you shall look upon it" (u-re'isem oso) because one of its central purposes is the correction of spiritual sight (re'iyah). Human beings see the outer form of the world first. Physical appearances can therefore become spiritually misleading. Something may appear impossible, frightening, desirable, or valuable because the eye sees only the external situation. Tzitzis is therefore a daily training of the eye. The Jew sees the physical threads and uses that physical sight to learn a deeper way of seeing the world itself (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5652).

• In the later years, the Sfas Emes develops remembrance (zechirah) into a deeper kind of memory. The neshamah existed before entering its present physical form. Chazal describe a child learning Torah before birth and forgetting it when entering the world. The Sfas Emes connects tzitzis with recovering something of that forgotten awareness. He writes that the person must return to the memory of his mission. The body and the physical world can become so dominant that a person begins to experience his current material life as the whole of his identity. The tzitzis are seen; the sight awakens remembrance; the remembrance leads to "And you shall perform all My commandments." A person who remembers his mission can direct his life toward fulfilling it (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5657).

• One of the most important ideas in the Sfas Emes is that the body is the garment of the soul (ha-guf hu levush ha-neshamah). The body is the garment through which the soul enters and acts within the physical world. This concept explains why the mitzvah of tzitzis is placed specifically upon clothing. The Sfas Emes connects the idea with Adam HaRishon. Before the sin, the relationship between body and soul was more transparent. Chazal and the Midrashic tradition speak about the change from garments of light (kosnos or with an alef) to garments of skin (kosnos or with an ayin). Every time the Jew puts on tzitzis, he is working on the relationship between the outer human being and the soul within. The body can become a garment that expresses the neshamah rather than hiding it (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5638).

• The same structure extends beyond the individual person. The Sfas Emes understands the corners (kenafos) as representing the farthest edges of created existence. The physical world spreads outward into innumerable separate forms, yet all of them remain dependent upon one Divine source. Tzitzis is placed precisely at the edges. The mitzvah teaches that even the most external level can be tied back to its root. In later years the Sfas Emes connects the four corners with the four basic elements from which the physical world is formed and the thirty-two threads with the Thirty-Two Pathways of Wisdom (lamed-beis nesivos chochmah) through which Creation receives its structure. Tzitzis therefore reaches toward the lowest and most external parts of reality. The fringes hang at the edge to teach that no edge lies beyond the possibility of connection to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5636).

• The Sfas Emes gives significance to the act of wrapping oneself (his'atfus) in the tallis. The human being possesses many different powers: thoughts, desires, senses, emotions, and actions. Physical life naturally pulls those powers in different directions. Wrapping in the talis represents their gathering. The Sfas Emes speaks of bringing the person's powers together into one place. Tzitzis at the four corners ensures that even the outer edges remain connected to this center. He later describes the purpose as "to unite within the root of Oneness." The physical world is a world of division (alma de-peruda), a world in which separate things appear independent

from one another. One garment surrounds the person; four different corners extend outward; each remains connected to the one garment. The Jew learns to gather the separate parts of his own life into a single allegiance to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5639).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Immediately following World War II the Klausenberger Rebbe was a source of inspiration to many in the Displaced Person's (DP) Camps. One day, the Rebbe received a package of tzitzis strings that he planned to distribute to the Jewish inmates. The Jewish survivors had not worn tzitzis in years, and they were extremely eager to begin wearing them. However, there were not enough strings for everyone. The Rebbe decided to make a raffle to determine who will get the strings. Hundreds of survivors gathered around the Rebbe as he began the raffle. There was a teenage boy named Mendel who was known as someone who had great enthusiasm for mitzvos. Mendel was excited about the prospect of finally getting tzitzis after all the years of the war of not having them. In his exuberance to fulfill the mitzvah, Mendel took the shirt he was wearing and made two huge tears on the sides, making his shirt into a four cornered garment. Before the Rebbe began the raffle, he quietly whispered to the Rebbe, "Rebbe, no one here really has an obligation, a chiyuv, to wear tzitzis because they are not wearing and do not even own a four cornered garment. I am the only one here who has a garment with four corners. I am the only one who has a chiyuv to wear them. I therefore need the tzitzis strings even before you start the raffle." The Rebbe greatly appreciated Mendel's argument and understood that he did it out of genuine exuberance for the mitzvah. But the Rebbe thought to himself, "Is Mendel correct? Should his 'trick' of tearing his shirt truly give him the right to get the strings without entering the raffle?" On one hand Mendel was right, he was the only one who had a bonafide chiyuv. But on the other hand, he placed himself in that position. He can sew up the tear and return himself to the same position that everyone else was in. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the tzitzis in the DP camp, Rav Zilberstein answered that once they agreed to have a raffle everyone had a chance to get tzitzis. If Mendel takes the tzitzis first, he will be taking away their chance. He does not have the right to eliminate or steal the others' chances.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume One, p. 330 (Table Talk Edition #80 (Parshas Shelach))

Eldad, a professional soccer player for Maccabi Tel Aviv, met an inspiring Rav and began learning with him. He attended the Rav's classes and loved learning Torah. Eventually, Eldad told his Rav that he wanted to make a commitment to his spiritual growth. The Rav suggested that he wear tzitzis, something that would be easy to do and not too difficult. Eldad followed his advice and proudly wore his tzitzis. Since Eldad was a professional soccer player, he would sometimes play on Shabbos, which is not exactly compatible with Shabbos observance. Eldad knew that one day he should stop playing on Shabbos, but at the moment, he was not yet at the level where he could quit his exciting career as a professional soccer player. One day, he had a major game before a large crowd of spectators and realized that as he ran during the game, his tzitzis would fly in the wind. He went to his Rav and asked, "I've been wearing my tzitzis every day, and I never forget them. But when I play on Shabbos, should I still wear them? "On one hand, it is a mitzvah to wear them at every moment. On the other hand, it might give the impression that a religious, observant Jew is playing soccer on Shabbos. That could send the wrong message and make it appear that this is permitted. What should I do? Should I wear them anyway, or should I remove them for the game to avoid giving the wrong impression and causing a chilul Hashem, a profanation of Hashem's name?" This question was brought to Rav Zilberstein and can be found in Veharev Na, Volume 2.

Answer: Regarding the question about playing soccer on Shabbos, Rabbi Zilberstein answered that since tzitzis is not an obligation, but a mitzvah kiyumis (because we do not normally wear four-cornered garments, we are not technically obligated to wear tzitzis), he should not wear tzitzis in this case as it will cause a zilzul of Shabbos, a disrespect for Shabbos, giving the impression that this is a permissible activity on Shabbos.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Two, Shelach (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 497 (Korach)

A teenage boy once swore that he will wear tzitzis all the time. Can he ever take them off? Can he take them off to take a shower? Does he have to get his oath nullified?

Answer: He did not mean to wear them in the shower. However, it should be nullified because even if he takes them for the shower, he may leave them off a moment before or after the shower.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume One, p. 188

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A police officer became a baal teshuvah and wanted to begin wearing his tzitzis strings outside his clothing. His superiors prohibited him from wearing his tzitzis visibly, however, because it was not in keeping with the standard police uniform. The newly observant officer claimed that he was being subjected to religious coercion. He went to consult with a prominent Sephardic rav, and was told that he should wear his tzitzis inside his clothing, as per the ruling of the Beis Yosef in Shulchan Aruch. The officer was Ashkenazi, however, and he wanted to follow the prevalent Ashkenazi practice that they should be worn outside. He was even prepared to lose his job over it, saying that he would be happy to be fired for keeping halachah. "Shalom Bayis is also a consideration, "Rav Elyashiv said after hearing the man's question. "Keep your-tzitzes inside, and don't lose your job."

Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 395

❖ 11 year old Uri had stomach cancer. He went to the radiation clinic for treatment. The nurse set the dial for the radiation machine and told Uri to undress. Uri complied and took off all his clothes except for his tzitzis. The nurse told him to take off his tzitzis. Uri politely refused saying that he feels that observing Hashem's will, will protect him. Frustrated, the nurse calls the head doctor, Benny Hoffman who amused, tries to convince him to take off his tzitzis. Dr. Hoffman looks at the dial and sees that it was set for double radiation dose, and Uri's refusal saved his life.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Abramsky once asked a friend to buy him some tzitzis threads. The man mentioned that two sorts of threads were available. Both were strictly kosher but one kind conformed to the most exacting possible standard and cost three times the price of the other. Rav Abramsky immediately said, "Here is the larger sum that you mentioned; however, for me the cheaper tzitzis are sufficient and as for the rest of the money - distribute it to tzedakah.

In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

A. TO LOOK AT THE TZITZIS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 10-1

As it is written "you should look at them and remember them (Bamidbar 15:39, Parshas Shelach)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What is the purpose of looking at tzitzis?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive commandment to look upon the tzitzis fringes, as Scripture states: 'And you shall look upon it and remember all the commandments of Hashem' (Bamidbar 15:39). As Chazal teach, gazing upon the fringes leads to remembrance of the commandments, and remembrance leads to their active fulfillment (Menachos 43b).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred involving a man who was exceedingly scrupulous in observing the mitzvah of Tzitzis. Once he faced a severe moral test and traveled to a distant coastal city where a wealthy courtesan lived in a palace furnished with gold and silver beds. At the moment of temptation, the four Tzitzis fringes of his garment came and struck him across his face like four witnesses warning him not to betray his Creator. He immediately slipped down and sat upon the floor in awe of Heaven. Deeply moved, the woman asked what blemish he had seen in her. He answered: 'By the Temple Service, I have never seen anyone as beautiful as you, wait—there is one mitzvah that the Lord our God commanded us called Tzitzis, in which it is written twice I am the Lord your God: I am He who will exact judgment, and I am He who will faithfully reward; and just now these four fringes appeared to me like four witnesses!' She rose, divided all her wealth—one third to the government, one third to the poor, and one third she took with her—and came to the study hall of Rabbi Chiya, converted in purity, and married him under the wedding canopy in holiness.

Menachos 44a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ An Israeli army officer, Guy Marder, lives north from where the terrorists attacked, and was celebrating Simchas Torah in Kiryat Gat, a 30-minute drive from Re'im. Hearing about the terrorist incursion, Guy got in his car and hurried south, carrying only his personal pistol. Arriving in the region of Re'im, Guy saw a badly wounded Golani soldier and took him into his car. At the same time a Hamas terrorist shot at his car, but Guy maneuvered away and managed to shoot the terrorist dead. Taking the soldier's gun, Guy killed another five terrorists on motorcycles. Having transferred the soldier to a field hospital, Guy joined a policeman travelling southward and once again they were attacked by terrorists. Guy and the policeman were injured in their legs and the car careened off the road. Guy was left in a ditch but still managed from there to eliminate more terrorists, after placing a tourniquet on his injured leg. He lay in the ditch for two hours with tens of dead terrorists nearby until the arrival of IDF forces. Unfortunately they thought that he was one of the terrorists as he was wearing civilian clothes. Guy cried that he was a soldier but was already weak from loss of blood. At the last minute one of the soldiers said: 'Don't shoot, he had tzitzis!' and thus his life was dramatically saved. Guy was taken to Beilinson Hospital where he was operated on and is now being treated.

From VINNEWS.com

BRIS MILAH & BODILY COVENANTS

5. To Perform Circumcision (Bris Milah)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 47

As the Torah says, And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male (Bereishis 17:12, Parshas Lech Lecha).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can we perform the milah at night?
- When does the day begin, after dawn, or sunrise?
- if one performed it before dawn, have they fulfilled the mitzvah?
- Can we do a bris on Shabbos?
- What if the bris is not being done on the eighth day, can it still override Shabbos?
- If the father never had his son circumcised. Wo does the obligation lie upon?
- What are the consequences of not having a bris done?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The circumcision must be performed exclusively during the daytime, as Scripture states: 'And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised' (Vayikra 12:3).

Ideally, the circumcision should be performed after sunrise; nevertheless, if it was conducted after dawn (alos hashachar), the biblical obligation has been fulfilled post facto.

When both the obligation and the eighth-day timing of the circumcision are halachically certain, the performance of the bris overrides the prohibitions of Shabbos (docheh Shabbos), even though causing a bleeding wound is ordinarily forbidden on the holy day.

Circumcision is a positive commandment whose willful omission incurs the severe penalty of celestial excision (kares), as Scripture states: 'And an uncircumcised male who will not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin — that soul shall be cut off from its people; he has broken My covenant' (Bereishis 17:14).

It is a primary biblical obligation for a father to circumcise his son; if the father fails to do so, he violates an active positive commandment (mitzvas aseh), though he is not liable for kares, as kares is incurred solely by the uncircumcised individual himself. If his father did not circumcise him, the son becomes personally obligated to circumcise himself once he reaches halachic adulthood; each day that passes after reaching maturity without circumcising himself constitutes an active violation of this positive commandment, and he incurs kares if he dies having willfully remained uncircumcised.

Whoever willfully breaches this covenant (meifer bris) by remaining uncircumcised, even if he possesses extensive Torah scholarship and good deeds, forfeits his share in the World to Come (Olam HaBa).

Exceedingly monumental is this commandment, for no fewer than thirteen divine covenants were established in the Torah over its enactment (Nedarim 31b).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The location of the bris is itself part of the Sfas Emes's explanation. The Sfas Emes teaches that this spiritual power (koach) has a spiritual root. The neshamah possesses a deep longing for Hashem and for its own source. When the same spiritual power (koach) becomes clothed in the physical body, it can appear primarily as bodily desire. The spiritual covering (orlah) strengthens the external expression. Milah weakens that obstruction so that the deeper desire can become more powerful. In Vayera the Sfas Emes describes the higher result through "lovesick for Hashem" (cholas ahavah). Once the bodily covering is weakened, the soul's longing for Hashem can become much more intense. Milah therefore sanctifies one of the strongest forces in human life by reconnecting physical desire with its deeper spiritual root (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5665).

• Chazal explain that before Avraham's milah, several bodily faculties did not stand completely under his control. After the bris, those faculties entered his reshus. The Sfas Emes understands this as a form of spiritual freedom (cheirus): "Through circumcision we become truly free, placing all our limbs under the mastery of holiness." Milah gives the person a greater ability to live with his limbs under the direction of the inner human being (adam). The point is connected to the wider struggle between physical body (guf) and higher soul (neshamah). This spiritual freedom (cheirus) is therefore a distinct result of the covenant. The body remains part of physical nature, while the person gains a spiritual capacity to rule his physical faculties rather than simply follow them (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5653).

• Milah prepares the physical person for Torah. The body that has received the covenant becomes a more suitable spiritual vessel (kli) for a Divine form that stands above ordinary nature. This connection goes even further. The two stages of the bris contain the basic structure of the mitzvah system. Milah, the removal of the spiritual covering (orlah), corresponds to removing what obstructs holiness. Periah, which uncovers the inner point, corresponds to bringing holiness into revelation. Bris milah places this entire pattern into the Jewish body at the beginning of life. The mitzvah therefore serves as an early model for all future avodah: remove what conceals the inner life and allow that inner holiness to become active (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5636).

• The Sfas Emes repeatedly treats the spiritual covering (orlah) as a covering over a holy point that already exists within the person. He connects this concealment with the sin of Adam HaRishon. After the Etz HaDaas, physical existence became a stronger covering over spiritual life. The Sfas Emes uses the language of "garments of skin" (kosnos or) and the Zohar's phrase, "the shed skin of the Primordial Serpent" (mashcha de-chivya). The Sfas Emes explains that the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) previously hidden within his own physical being now became accessible. His flesh itself could become a place of "From my very flesh I behold God" (mi-besari echezeh Elokai). Milah therefore repairs one consequence of Adam's sin by opening the physical body toward the spiritual light hidden inside it (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5642).

• The Sfas Emes frequently uses the word spiritual form (tziyur) when discussing milah. The Sfas Emes explains that this reflects a real transformation: Avraham had become "like a brand-new creation" (ki-veriyah chadashah): "through circumcision the inner Divine image is revealed within him, and he becomes like a new creation." Milah

reveals an inner form and gives the child a new covenantal identity. The Sfas Emes connects this with the custom of giving the child his name at the bris. This teaching deserves to stand independently from the idea of the body becoming a spiritual vessel (kli). The Sfas Emes is describing the revelation of a distinctively Jewish spiritual form (tziyur), a new form of the human person created through the covenant (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5652).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

The world for foreskin, is Orlah. Orlah means something that is blocked from full control. Milas orla means to oppose a lack of control to develop self control. The purpose of a milah is to give us greater control over our sexual impulses. This also symbolizes the need in general for control over our primal urges. This symbol is therefore the basic symbol of our relationship and covenant with Hashem: We are to try to perfect ourselves by exerting control over our baser urges. This will make us come close to Hashem. This mitzvah both through is message, impact and influence, indeed helps us to correct our character so that we can come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

KUZARI (MA'AMAR 1:115)

The bris milah reminds us to use our reproductive organs in a holy way.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:49)

Removing the foreskin makes that area a bit less sensitive, and takes away a bit of the pleasure and urge for sexual intimacy. This allows us to be able to develop greater self control in that area.

In addition, it is an external sign that unites all Jews and demonstrates that we are Jews. Because it is in such a sensitive area, most people who are not Jewish will not willingly remove the foreskin.

RADAK (BEREISHIS 17:9)

Most transgressions stem from the primal drive for sexuality. Now that one has a bris milah, whenever he wants to do an aveirah that stems from sexuality, he will remember his bris milah and refrain from the aveirah.

RABBEINU BACHYA

The bris milah is a permanent sign on our bodies that testifies to our relationship to Hashem. Just as the sign is permanent so is our relationship with Hashem permanent.

BECHOR SHOR

The bris is a sign of our relationship with Hashem. The sign was made in a private place that is almost never seen, so that we will not appear to be disfigured or blemished.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 2)

The bris demonstrates that we are totally different from non-Jews. Just as we are different from the nations with our values, so are we are different in our bodies. And just as our bodies are different so are our values.

In addition, the fact that he had to do an action to help control our passions, demonstrates the purpose of the whole Torah and our relationship to Hashem, that we are work on our character to control, refine and perfect ourselves.

SFORNO

The sign of our relationship with Hashem is on the organ that allows for the perpetuation of the Jewish people. Just like the reproductive organs create our posterity, our relationship with Hashem should span through posterity.

ABARBANEL

If we sanctify the organ that produces children, then children will be conceived in holiness.

KLI YAKAR

The removal of the obstruction of the orlah (foreskin) is symbolic of removing the spiritual barrier that separates a man's heart from Hashem.

SFAS EMES

• The famous Midrash records the challenge of Turnus Rufus to Rabbi Akiva: if Hashem desires circumcision, why did He create babies uncircumcised? Rabbi Akiva answers by comparing raw wheat with bread. Hashem deliberately created a world that human beings are meant to develop. The Sfas Emes takes this question to the heart of the mitzvah. He writes that nature is created with incompleteness. The spiritual deficiency (chisaron) leaves room for avodah. Hashem gives the human being a natural form, and the mitzvos allow a deeper form hidden within that nature to emerge. The child therefore receives a profound lesson before he can consciously learn it: his natural condition is the beginning of his task. Hashem created human beings with the ability to participate in bringing themselves toward the form for which they were created (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5638).

• Hashem tells Avraham, “Walk before Me and be wholehearted.” The wording presents one of the great paradoxes of bris milah. The Sfas Emes explains that a created being receives its true completeness through connection with its source. The physical mark of incompleteness (chisaron) expresses self-nullification (bittul), the recognition that the created person does not possess independent perfection. His life and completeness (sheleimus) flow from Hashem. The Sfas Emes also describes two levels within the human being: “the power of the soul within the body”—the life-force operating inside the body—and “the power of the higher soul Above,” the higher root of the neshamah that cannot be completely contained within physical existence. Avraham becomes wholehearted (tamim) through this union. His lower physical existence can now participate more fully in the spiritual source above it (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5636).

• Avraham Avinu had already reached extraordinary spiritual heights before his bris. Chazal teach that he fulfilled the Torah before it was commanded. The Sfas Emes therefore asks, in effect, what the covenant added. In 5653 he gives a remarkable answer. Through the tremendous power of his emunah, Avraham personally reached beyond the ordinary limitations of nature. Yet there was no established path inside the physical human organism through which the body itself could be lifted from complete immersion in nature. The Sfas Emes is explaining why a special Divine covenant had to enter Avraham's physical body. Milah implants a supernatural capacity into Jewish physical existence and allows the achievement of Avraham to become a path available to his children (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5653).

• The Torah commands "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (u-va-yom ha-shemini yimol). The Sfas Emes repeatedly explains the number eight as part of the essence of milah. Seven represents the completed natural cycle. The world was created through seven days. Eight begins beyond that cycle and therefore represents a dimension above the natural order (lema'alah min ha-teva). A Jewish child first passes through seven days and experiences a Shabbos. On the eighth day he receives a permanent covenantal sign (os) connecting his physical body with a root that stands above the ordinary natural order. The bris therefore places a point of Olam Haba within present physical existence. The Jew continues living inside the seven-day world while carrying a covenantal sign (os) rooted in the eighth (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tazria 5647).

• The Torah introduces the command of milah with the Divine declaration "I am El Shaddai; walk before Me and be wholehearted" (Bereishis 17:1). Chazal explain the Name Shaddai as the One who said "Enough" to the expanding Creation. The Sfas Emes sees this Divine name as part of the meaning of the bris. Created existence naturally spreads outward. The farther something extends into physicality, the easier it becomes for its outer form to obscure its source. Hashem places measure and boundary (gevul) into Creation so that expansion remains connected to its purpose. The spiritual covering (orlah) represents a form of physical excess. Hashem determines the boundary (gevul) of the repair entrusted to man. Physical nature receives its proper boundary, and human avodah itself accepts the form and measure given by Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5642).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man became a Jewish convert. He learned for several years in yeshivah and his non-Jewish father supported his learning. When the man had a son, the gentile grandfather asked if he could be the sandek at the bris. The man would like to say yes to show his gratitude to his father. Can a non-Jewish father who supported his son be a sandek by his grandson's bris?

Answer: A gentile should not act as the Sandek because it is an essential component of the Bris. The father should be asked to participate in some other way.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume One, p. 128

A Jewish immigrant from the Soviet Union who had extensive military training arrived in Israel precisely as the Yom Kippur War erupted. Having never received a circumcision due to Communist oppression, he wished to undergo a Bris Milah immediately upon arrival. However, recovering from surgery would incapacitate him for several days, preventing him from reporting to the front lines where skilled soldiers were desperately needed to save lives. Which takes halachic precedence: undergoing Bris Milah immediately or reporting straight to the battlefront to defend the Jewish nation?

Answer: Based on the Gemara in Yoma (85b) and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 330:4) — which establish that an adult post-circumcision patient is considered in potential mortal danger (safek sakanah) particularly on the third day due to physical weakness — Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that a soldier facing active combat and guard duty against enemies must postpone his adult bris milah until after the military danger passes, because pikuach nefesh overrides the timing of milah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 580

In Israel, during one winter, a newborn baby was found bundled up in a baby carrier, at the front door of the hospital. The baby was quiet and peaceful, There was a note in the baby carrier. The note came from the mother of the baby. She said that to her great regret she is incapable for caring for the baby and she had nobody to turn to. She hopes that the hospital can find a loving Jewish family to raise the baby. She wrote that the baby was born on Shabbos, December 23. The hospital administration quickly made arrangements to care for the baby. They brought the following question to Rav Zilberstein. The note said that the baby was born on December 23 which was Shabbos. If the baby was born on Shabbos, then the bris should be the next Shabbos. The mitzvah to do a bris would override the mitzvah of Shabbos. But perhaps when she said the baby was born on Shabbos, she didn't realize that Shabbos had already passed. Perhaps the baby was born after Shabbos concluded. Should they trust the note and do the Bris on Shabbos or should they do it on Sunday? On one hand they there is a mitzvah to do the Bris on the 8th day which is Shabbos. But on the other hand, perhaps the baby was truly born on Sunday. Which day should they do the bris?

Answer: The note is sufficient testimony to break Shabbos and perform the bris on Shabbos in this case.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume One, p. 252 (Table Talk Edition 057)

Rabbi Hurvitz was a popular mohel in Eretz Yisrael. He was often invited to the homes of secular Israeli Jews to perform the bris milah. While these Jews were not religious, they were knowledgeable and traditional enough to know that a Jew gets circumcised at eight days. One day Rabbi Hurvitz was invited to the home of the Refaeili family. It was a small affair with a few close family members. Right before the bris Mr. Refaeili turned to Rabbi Hurwitz. "My wife and I could not think of a name for the baby. So we had an idea. We opened up a Chumash for some name ideas. The first name we came across that we found interesting was 'Nimrod'. The Chumash says Nimrod was a gibor. He was a Hero. That name sounds powerful and we liked the sound of it. We would like to call the baby Nimrod." Rabbi Hurvitz tried to suggest some other ideas, but the couple was dead set on their idea. Rabbi Hurvitz thought to himself that our Sages describe Nimrod as a cruel and evil person. Our Sages teach that the name one gives to a baby has a spiritual effect on the baby and it would be a bad choice to give a child that limitation. The parents didn't realize it, but they were harming their child. Rabbi Hurvitz had the following thought. Most couples he worked with didn't usually pay that much attention to the naming part of the ceremony. Perhaps when the name was called, he would call the baby a nice Jewish name like Avraham. The parents may not even realize. That way the official name of the baby's neshamah would be Avraham. If we could speak to the neshamah of this baby he would definitely prefer to be called Avraham rather than Nimrod. The parents may call him Nimrod, but at least that won't be the baby's real name as called by his bris. Perhaps the neshamah's wishes would be more important than the parent's wishes. On the other hand, however, the parents did not want that name. They wanted to call him Nimrod. Perhaps he needed to respect their wishes even if it wasn't good for the baby. Perhaps he needed to respect their wishes even if they would not realize what he did. Whose wishes are more important? The wishes of the neshamah of the baby, or the wishes of the parents, who are making a bad choice for their baby? Rabbi Hurwitz eventually brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think he should do? Name the baby Avraham without the parents realizing, or call him Nimrod like they requested, even though the baby's neshamah would not want that?

Answer: Regarding the question of giving a different name than Nimrod at the Bris, Rav Zilberstein gives a surprising answer. He said that it would be wrong to name a Jewish child after a Rasha. The Mohel should say "And May his name be called among Yisrael, Avraham", as a protest against the name Nimrod that the parents planned to call him.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 294

Avraham was asked to be a sandek at the bris of someone he knew in his neighborhood. Avraham's friend, named Eli, heard that Avraham was going to attend. Eli came to Avraham and said, "I heard that you're going to be a sandek tomorrow. Can I please ask you a huge favor?" Avraham said, "Of course." Eli said, "My father is scheduled to have surgery around the same time as the circumcision. It is known that the sandek has a great power of prayer because the sandek is like the mizbeach, the altar, that supports a korban as it's being offered to Hashem. Therefore, can you please daven for the success of my father's surgery that'll happen at the same time that you're the sandek?" Avraham said, "Of course, it will be my pleasure." Then, without any further discussion, Eli pulled out 500 shekels and said, "Here, I want you to have this in exchange for your efforts." Avraham needed the money and was very grateful for the kind gesture. The next day, Avraham attended the bris, and it went smoothly as planned. While he was the sandek and the baby was on his lap, Avraham davened with tears and an extremely heartfelt prayer that Eli's father should be healthy and go through the surgery successfully. Shortly after the bris, Eli called Avraham with great joy, "You're never going to guess - my father's surgery was successful! It was clear that your tefillos worked. My father is going to be on a good trajectory for recovery. Thank you so, so much for your prayers and for helping me and my father." Avraham said it was his pleasure and was delighted to have done it. Later that afternoon, however, Avraham got a call from the mohel. The mohel said, "You're not going to believe this, but we finally got some information that I've been trying to get for a while. It turns out that the mother of the baby, in fact, never underwent a proper conversion. She's not Jewish, and therefore it turns out that there was really no mitzvah of bris milah, and it turns out that you were not a sandek. Therefore, even though normally a sandek would not say tachanun, by Minchah, in this case, because you're not a sandek, you should say Tachanun." Avraham was shocked, but he then faced the following dilemma: For whatever reason, even though he wasn't the sandek, the patient who had the surgery did well. Eli thinks that it was in merit of his prayers as a sandek that he was successful. Now that he was not a sandek, and in fact there was never a bris, would he be allowed to keep the money? Eli wouldn't give the money to just any person; he was planning on only giving it to a sandek. He wouldn't give it to any random neighbor. Now, because he wasn't a sandek, perhaps it was given under false pretenses. So, the question Avraham had was, did he have an obligation to call up Eli and tell him, "By the way, I was never really a sandek," or could he keep the money? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the sandek, Rav Zilberstein wrote that the sandek would have a responsibility to offer to return the money back to the father, because it was not really a bris milah, and therefore it was given under false conditions.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Vayikra, p. 189

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred involving King Monobaz and Zavatus (Izates), sons of King Talmai, who were sitting and reading the Book of Genesis. When they reached this verse: 'And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin' (Bereishis 17:11), one turned his face to the wall and wept, and the other turned his face to the wall and wept. Both of them went and circumcised themselves. Sometime later, they were sitting and reading the Book of Genesis together again. When they reached this verse, 'And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin,' one brother said to the other: 'Woe to you, my brother!' The other replied: 'Woe to you—to me, there is no woe!' Thereupon, they revealed the matter to one another.

When their mother noticed their condition, she went and said to their father: 'A boil has appeared upon the flesh of your sons, and the physician decreed that they must be circumcised.' The king said to her: 'Let them be circumcised!' How did the Holy One, blessed be He, repay them? Rabbi Pinchas said: When Izates went out to battle, an ambushing force surrounded him, and an angel descended from Heaven and saved him.

Bereishis Rabbah 46:10

❖ In a discussion with the emperor, the emperor suggested that the Jews and non-Jews become one nation. R' Tanchum replied, "We who are circumcised cannot be like you; if you circumcise yourselves you will become like us." The emperor answered, "You have spoken well. Nevertheless, whoever gets the better of the king in a debate must be thrown into an arena of wild beasts." R' Tanchum was thrown in, but he was not eaten. A heretic who was present commented, "They did not eat him because they were not hungry," whereupon the heretic was thrown in and was eaten.

Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 39a

❖ Rabban Gamliel taught: When Avraham Avinu was commanded regarding the covenant of Bris Milah, he sent and summoned Shem the son of Noach, who circumcised Avraham and his son Yishmael 'in the very bone of that day'—at bright midday before the eyes of all, so that no one could say: 'Had we seen him doing so, we would have stopped him!' On the third day after his circumcision, when the pain was most intense, the Holy One, blessed be He, brought out scorching heat so that no travelers would trouble His righteous servant. Yet Avraham grieved that no guests were passing by and sent Eliezer out to scan the road; seeing Avraham's yearning to do kindness even in his pain, Hashem sent His Ministering Angels in the likeness of travelers to his tent door.

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer, Chapter 29

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Shimshon Pincus' self-negation was total and complete. There was no ego, for the only reality was the Ribono shel Olam. A couple from Ofakim were blessed with a son, and the father requested that the Rav serve as sandak at the bris. The bris, however, was to be on Shabbos, and it was being held in Petach Tikvah. Rav Shimshon agreed to participate in the simchah and travel to Petach Tikvah for Shabbos. To appreciate the sacrifice inherent in this decision, one would have to realize that Rav Shimshon's schedule kept him away from his family several days a week. He often bemoaned the fact that, while he felt a responsibility to lead a life that kept him perpetually in transit, he ached to see the faces of his children more often. Shabbos was not only his time at home; it was also when he had an opportunity to spend time with his beloved kehillah. Aside from the numerous shiurim he delivered on Shabbos, Leil Shabbos after the seudah was a particularly special time. He would deliver a shiur in Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, after which the participants would sing and discuss any topic they chose with him. Recent ba'alei teshuvah and accomplished talmidei chachamim alike would use this forum to unburden themselves of questions about Yiddishkeit. These spontaneous conversations would often last until early morning, and were the highlight of the week for many residents of Ofakim. Another reason that traveling would be inconvenient was the fact that Rav Shimshon was extremely meticulous with what he ate, and he would only eat food that his wife had prepared. Yet, given the sensitivities and needs of this particular ba'al simchah, the Rav decided he would go. Reb Avraham was his Rebbe's companion on that Shabbos and he described what happened. Shabbos morning the Rav entered the shul, and noted the presence of the baby's two grandfathers. He turned to the avi haben and inquired if his father had been sandak at other brissim in the family. When he replied in the affirmative, the Rav asked if he had already been mechabed his father-in-law. He replied that he hadn't. The Rav told him that his father-in-law would serve as sandak. When the fellow began to protest, Rav Shimshon told him that he didn't feel up to it, that he was feeling particularly weak. Later on Reb Avraham asked Rav Shimshon if it was really worth it to leave his family, his kehillah, and endure the hassle of packing up his own food, and then not even serve as sandak. Rav Shimshon laughed. "That is all shtuyos, nonsense," he

declared emphatically, "compared to the strengthening of one Yiddishe home!" Some time later, the baal bris described to Reb Avraham his wife's joy upon learning that her father had been sandak. "She could not sleep that whole night, so great was her excitement!"

Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Gifter told a story to illustrate the emunah of Rav Mottel Pogromansky: Shortly after World War II, Rav Mottel and a friend were traveling, and planned to reach their destination well before Shabbos. However, they became engrossed in discussion and missed their stop. By the time they disembarked, it was almost Shabbos, and they had no idea where they were! Rav Mottel's friend was horrified! What would they do? Shabbos was approaching, and they were nowhere near a Jewish community. But Rav Mottel reassured his friend, "A Jew is never lost! If we are here, it is not because we are lost; it is because we are meant to be here!" He proved his point from the story of Hagar. When she was sent away from Avraham's home, the Torah says (Bereishis 21:14) that she was lost. Rashi comments that she returned to the house of her father and to a life of idol worship, Rav Mottel asked, "How do we know that Hagar went back to her life of idol worship? Maybe she was just lost. The answer is that a person who is following the word of Hashem is never lost, because he realizes that wherever he is now is exactly where Hashem wants him to be. Hagar's, lamentation showed that she had abandoned her faith in the Almighty; she had returned to her ways of idol worship' Rav Mottel's friend told him, "The vort is wonderful, but mir zennen fort fablunget, we are still lost!" Not one to give up hope, Rav Mottel inquired and discovered that there was indeed one Jew in the town. They went to his home. When the man opened the door, he was stunned to find two Jews on his doorstep. He could not believe his eyes. "Are you Eliyahu HaNavi?" he asked the strangers in shock. Rav Mottel informed the man that he was just a Jew by the name of Mottel Pogromansky and he introduced his friend. The host invited them in and explained that he and his wife had a baby boy the Shabbos before. They had tried to get a mohel to come to the city for Shabbos to perform the bris, but they were unable to find anyone willing to come. "Would either of you happen to be a mohel?" Rav Mottel smiled. He informed their host that indeed his friend was a mohel and that he even had his circumcision equipment with him. Remarkably, the little baby merited to be circumcised on Shabbos, the eighth day! This vignette was retold by the Rosh hayeshivah when he wanted to highlight the emunah of Rav Mottel Pogromansky, a Jew who always felt that he was in the Hands of the Almighty.

Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Eleven years before Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman passed away, R' Avraham Pechter, the Rosh Kollel of Midrash Eliyahu in Elad, wanted to honor him with being sandek at his son's bris. By then, R' Aharon Leib was no longer traveling outside Bnei Brak to be sandek, so the Pechters decided to make the bris in Bnei Brak, hoping he would attend. However, when R' Pechter shared his plans with R' Aharon Leib, he vetoed them. “You are a Rosh Kollel,” he said. “You are accustomed to traveling around the world. You may not be sensitive to the fact that your wife would appreciate her friends' attendance at the bris. It will be better if you find another sandek and do the bris in Elad, so your wife's friends can participate in the simchah!" R' Pechter wouldn't take no for an answer. He returned to R' Aharon Leib and told him that his wife preferred that the bris take place in R' Aharon Leib's presence in Bnei Brak rather than Elad. Finally, R' Aharon Leib agreed to travel to Elad in honor of R' Pechter's kollel. After the bris he gave a shiur to the avreichim.

From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Such insight came from an exceptional level of divine assistance Rav Nota Greenblatt seemed to merit, demonstrated by many of his experiences, including the following: Rav Nota was once asked to visit a hospital somewhere in Milwaukee to perform a bris. The doctors and nurses were perfectly cooperative and allowed Rav Nota to examine the baby. He wa quick to note that something was wrong and shared his finding with the nurse, who was surprised. "I will come back in one week to check up on the baby again, Rav Nota informed her. One week later, Rav Nota returned and sought out the nurse he had spoken with the previous week. He asked her about the baby and she looked horrified. "Don't you know? The baby died! He

had a hole in his heart!" Rav Nota was incensed. "The doctors must have known that!" he fumed. "Why didn't they say anything?" The nurse lowered her eyes. "Of course they knew. They were waiting for the circumcision so they could blame the baby's death on that."

From Rav Nota, by R' Shmuel Botnick, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Selmar lifted the phone in his North Miami Beach home. "Rabbi Selmar? Hi, this is Dr. Zvi Chyro, from West Kendall. Would you be able to perform the bris on my son next week?" Rabbi Selmar thought quickly. The bris would be on Shavuos, and it would be too far for him to walk, so he would need to stay at someone's house nearby. Then again, a bris often falls out on Shabbos or Yom Tov, so it was all a part of his job. "No problem, Dr. Chyro. But I will need a place to stay in your area." "Of course, Rabbi Selmar. I'll arrange for you to stay by the Rav's house, Rabbi Hershel Becker. He's going to be the sandek." On Shavuos morning, Rabbi Selmar walked over to where the bris was being held and performed the circumcision. Since the baby had actually been born partially circumcised, there was a small chance of a complication, but he felt confident that all had gone well. Still, he decided to caution the parents before leaving. "If you do see anything that worries you, please call me at the Rav's home. Let's use a signal, say, ring two times and hang up, and then ring two times again. That way I'll know it's you, and I'll come over right away. I'm sure it won't be necessary, though. Everything seems to be fine." With that, Rabbi Selmar made his way back to the Rav's house for the Yom Tov meal. That afternoon, the phone began to ring. It rang twice, then stopped. Half a minute later, it rang once, then stopped. "Maybe that was the Chyro's," the Rebbetzin said thoughtfully. "I know it wasn't exactly the signal, but it might have gotten messed up. Look, it's a nice day outside. Why not just go over and check it out?" Rabbi Selmar readily agreed. He grabbed his case and made his way to the Chyro home. Everything seemed quiet. He knocked, but there was no answer. "Maybe it was a real emergency," he began to worry. "Maybe they went to the hospital!" Now Rabbi Selmar began to pound on the door, hoping that someone would be able to tell him what was going on. The door opened suddenly. A surprised family member was groggily blinking at him. "Why, it's the mohel! Is something wrong? What brings you here?" "I got the phone signal at the Rav's house, so I came right over." "Oh, I'm so sorry. That must have been a wrong number. Everything is fine here! What a shame that you schlepped out here for nothing." "Well, as long as I'm here, let me check on the baby," Rabbi Selmar suggested. Rabbi Selmar went into the baby's room. The infant seemed to be sleeping peacefully. He turned the baby over to check on him and immediately noticed that the infant was bleeding heavily. He quickly took action and, with Hashem's help, was able to finally stop the bleeding. Rabbi Selmar whispered a silent thanks to Hashem for the miracle that had just occurred. If not for those anonymous phone calls, he dreaded to think of what would have happened to the child.

Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers

❖ Rena was waiting anxiously. Where were they already? Finally, there was a knock on the door. Rena's husband, Uri, entered with a little bundle in his arms. Behind him was a man they had only recently met. He was known simply as Reb Avraham. "Mazal tov, Mrs. Baruchov," said Reb Avraham. "Everything went just fine." "Yes," added Uri. "Reb Avraham performed the bris and everything went as planned. Baruch Hashem, no 'surprise guests' showed up. Here, Rena," and he undid the blanket around the infant whom he held, "hold our little Yosef. Finally, our child has a Hebrew name." Rena picked up the small crying infant, kissed him on the cheek... and fainted. Under the Communists, circumcising an infant was considered an act of "religious coercion." The Communists, always "concerned" for the rights of their citizens, declared it a crime to perform a bris until a boy turned eighteen, at which time he could decide for himself whether or not he wanted to be circumcised. Of course, until a boy turned eighteen, the Communists did a very good job of brainwashing him to despise religion and even to deny belief in the existence of a Creator. When they turned eighteen, most Jewish boys had not the faintest notion what bris milah was about. Rena had been raised in a religious home and understood the importance of bris milah. She knew that a Jewish boy without a bris was a spiritually impaired soul. However, she knew that it would be impossible to have her child's bris performed on the eighth day. First, a qualified mohel had to be found who was willing to undertake the great risk of performing this mitzvah. Then, a plan had to be formulated through which

the circumcision could be done in utmost secrecy. It would not be easy. The Rebbe did not know how long it would be until her son could enter into the covenant of the Patriarch Avraham. She did however know one thing. The longer her son's bris was delayed, the greater was the danger that she would grow accustomed to his being uncircumcised. And what if it would be months or even years before the bris could be performed? The need to fulfill the mitzvah might, G-d forbid, become forgotten... Rena decided to do something that would allow her no rest until her baby would have his bris. She promised herself that she would not kiss her little boy until he was circumcised. And so, from the day that he was born, Rena cuddled her baby, held him on her shoulder, rocked him to sleep — but never once did she kiss him. And now, as she held her little Yosef in her arms, all the love and emotion that had been welling up inside of her for so long burst forth as she kissed him for the very first time. And then she fainted.

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ At a bris in the shul, the Rav, Rav Avigdor Miller, noticed the father of the baby in a quandary when delegating the honors, as an important individual came in and he did not have a kibbud left for him. When Rabbi Miller was called up to make the bracha, he apologized, saying he could not do so because he had a cold. The mohel reassured the Rav that the baby could be held far away, but the Rav insisted that he could not do it, thereby giving the honor to the other important person. After the bris, the father thanked the Rav for solving his dilemma. Rabbi Miller smiled at him.

From Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and Revolution, by Yaakov Y. Hamburger, published by Judaica Press

❖ On one occasion, Rav Dov Landau related the following story: The Chazon Ish once went to a bris milah where he was given the honor of being sandak. After the bris, a large crowd gathered around him seeking berachos and advice. The Chazon Ish heard what each person wanted, and when he finished, he turned to go. When he got into the car, he told the driver, "For the first fifty feet, drive slowly, and then drive as usual." The driver did not understand the request. The Chazon Ish explained: "If you drive at regular speed as soon as I get into the car, it will look like I'm running away from the tzibbur. Then the people who spoke to me will feel badly for delaying me, so drive slowly." Rav Dov Landau concluded, "Everyone should act like that toward others. When a person meets us on the street and talks to us, we must be careful not to make him feel that we are uninterested in the conversation or that his words are a burden."

From At His Table, Published by Tfutza Publications

A. IF A FATHER DID NOT PERFORM THE CIRCUMCISION, THE COURTS SHOULD OVERSEE THAT IT IS DONE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 20-2,3

As it says "you shall surely circumcise every male" (Vayikra 12:13, Parshas Tazria).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What should be done if the courts don't do this?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

If the father failed to circumcise his son, the rabbinic court (beis din) is obligated to ensure that he is circumcised, as Scripture commands: 'He shall surely be circumcised' (himol yimol; Bereishis 17:13; Kiddushin 29a).

If the court neglected this obligation and did not circumcise him, then once he reaches halachic adulthood, he is personally obligated to circumcise himself. For every single day that passes after reaching maturity without circumcising himself, he violates an active positive commandment that entails celestial excision (kares), as Scripture states: 'And an uncircumcised male who will not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin — that soul shall be cut off from its people' (Bereishis 17:14).

A master is obligated to circumcise his Canaanite servants — both those born into his household and those acquired through purchase — as Scripture states: 'He who is born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner… shall be circumcised' (Bereishis 17:12).

It is likewise a commandment incumbent upon the rabbinic court (beis din) to oversee the circumcision of converts who enter the covenant of Klal Yisroel.

B. TO MAKE A SEUDAH FOR A BRIS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-3

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic mitzvah to prepare a festive celebration meal (seudas mitzvah) in honor of a bris milah, following the precedent of Avraham Avinu, who celebrated the circumcision of his son Yitzchak with a great feast (Bereishis 21:8; Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 29; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 265:12).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ R' Boruch Dunner was a talmid in Gateshead when Rav Matisyahu Salomon was appointed mashgiach in 1968. R' Boruch had just celebrated the birth of a son. The fact that the bris was not held on time did not diminish the joy; it just made things difficult to plan. When finally, a few days later, the mohel gave the go-ahead to hold the bris that same day, the big question was, how could they pull together a bris seudah on such short notice? R' Boruch and his wife decided that they couldn't. Therefore, they opted to have the actual bris right then, in the morning, with Rav Mattisyahu serving as sandek. However, the bris seudah was held later that evening. When Rav Mattisyahu heard the plans, he knew he would not be able to attend the seudah because he had to be out of town. He also knew that R' Boruch would feel very bad about his absence. At the conclusion of the bris ceremony, R' Boruch noticed Rav Mattisyahu approaching. "Mazal tov, R' Boruch!" Rav Mattisyahu exclaimed. "I just want to let you know that I cannot join you for the seudah tonight, but I would love to come to your house one afternoon for a 'seudah ketanah.'" He was so busy, every minute of his day (and even most of the night!) was so precious. Yet he recognized just how much it would mean to R' Boruch if he could sit and celebrate his simchah with him! R' Boruch excitedly gathered his whole family, and together they enjoyed a fleishig seudah with Rav Mattisyahu, who sang Yom L'Yabashah with them and sat there as if he had nothing else to do with his time. "It is now thirty years later, and I still have a warm feeling when I close my eyes and remember that wonderful seudah!" R' Baruch related. So many people, all made to feel like they were the singular, most important person in the heart of the Mashgiach!

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One of the ge'onim of the generation was present at the se'udah celebrating the bris of one of The Brisker Rav's grandsons, and proclaimed emotionally, "Ah! Baruch Hashem, we have merited to attend such an important and illustrious bris!" The Brisker Rav heard his words and immediately answered, "A bris is a positive commandment that carries the

penalty of kareis for one who does not perform it. Thirteen covenants were established over this mitzvah. Certainly, it makes no difference if the person fulfilling the mitzvah is a simple, poor man or a great and mighty one. For how is it possible to add anything to the desirability and importance of this great mitzvah?!" He continued with the following parable: "To what can we compare this? To a poor schoolteacher who says that if he were appointed king he would be wealthier than the present king. His reasoning was that not only would he have control over the kingdom's treasury, but since he is a melamed, he would have the additional income from his job..."

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 442

❖ Rav Segal strongly believed in the power of the blessings of ordinary people. Once, a baby boy was born with life-threatening complications. On Friday morning, the doctors told the father that his baby did not have much longer to live. The despondent father discussed the situation with the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Segal. "Make the shalom zachor tonight," the Rosh Yeshivah advised; "At a shalom zachor, everyone wishes the father 'Mazel Tov!' and offers a blessing that the child be raised to Torah, chuppah and good deeds.' For these blessings alone it is worthwhile to have a shalom zachor. The father followed these instructions and to the doctors' amazement, the complications cleared up and the baby attained good health.

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One month after the Weintraubs moved in near Rebbetzin Kanievsky, the two women were chatting outside they noticed that a bris was being celebrated in the Lederman Shul next door. "I'm going over to wish mazel tov," Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky announced. "Who is making a bris?" asked the newcomer. Batsheva replied that she had no idea — but she liked going to s'machos to say mazel tov even if she didn't know the baalei simchah! Of course, knowing the balei simchah was even better.

Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

6. Not to Eat the Sciatic Nerve (Gid HaNasheh)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 1

As the Torah says, Therefore the children of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh-vein (Bereishis 32:33, Parshas Vayishlach).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Does this prohibition apply to both a cow as well as a deer?
- If a cow was slaughtered and they found an embryo, inside the cow, that embryo does not need shchita. Is there a prohibition of gid hanashe on the embryo?
- Is the prohibition on only one side of the gid, or both sides?
- Is the fat near the gid permitted?
- Does this prohibition apply to an animal that was not slaughtered properly?
- Can one sell the gid hanashe and derive benefit from it?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition applies to all kosher species of domestic animals (beheimos) and wild beasts (chayos);

And it applies equally to an embryo found within a slaughtered animal;

And it governs both the right and left thighs of the animal.

There are two sinews running through the thigh: The inner sinew, adjacent to the hip socket, is biblically forbidden by the law of the Torah; the remainder of this inner sinew extending beyond the socket, along with the entire outer sinew, their surrounding fat (chelev hagid), and all branching sinews and membranes, are forbidden by rabbinic decree.

If an individual consumes the sciatic nerve (gid hanasheh) of an unslaughtered carcass (neveilah) or a mortally wounded animal (treifah), he violates two distinct biblical prohibitions: the prohibition against consuming the sciatic nerve, and the prohibition against consuming neveilah or treifah.

Through the Oral Tradition received from Sinai, we learn that although consuming the sciatic nerve is strictly forbidden, one is fully permitted to derive non-eating benefit (hana'ah) from it.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

Not eating the Gid HaNasheh reminds us of the fact that just as Hashem protected our ancestor Yaakov, so will He protect us against the anti Semites of the ages. This mitzvah fills us with an influence that helps us trust in Hashem and love Hashem. That trust in Hashem helps us develop a devotion to the Torah which helps us to perfect our character.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RASHBA

Removing the Gid Hanashe is like a symbolic prayer. We are praying, that just as Yaakov had this ability to withstand the attacks of his enemies, so should all of the Jewish people withstand their attacks and may Hashem give us a national immortality.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 3)

Yaakov was only wounded, and not defeated, but he was cured in the morning. This is a symbol that the Jewish people will only be wounded by our enemies, but never defeated. And at the dawn of history, when humanity becomes enlightened by the wisdom of the Torah in the messianic era, all of our wounds will be healed.

CHIZKUNI

Yackov was attacked because he was left alone. We remove the gid hanashe to remember this incident and never let a Jew feel alone.

ALSHICH

Yackov was punished with this injury because he committed the sin of marrying two sisters. This reminds us that even the great Yaakov was not immune to sin and that as great as we are, we can still slip.

RADAK BEREISHIS (32:33)

Because our common ancestor was injured in that area, we don't eat that and show our respect. This reminds us that we all have a common grandfather who we respect.

RASHBAM

This helps us remember Yaakov's spiritual strength, how he was able to withstand the attack of an angel and was not killed.

SFAS EMES

• In a separate explanation the Sfas Emes approaches gid hanasheh through the relation of the 248 positive mitzvos to the 365 negative mitzvos. He cites the Zohar's comparison between the prohibited sinew and Tishah BeAv, the day associated with Esav's spiritual force. His own explanation is that positive commandments draw illumination into the human being, while prohibitions remove barriers that would prevent that illumination from passing through the person's spiritual structure. The language of sinews and limbs is therefore essential to his argument rather than an incidental anatomical metaphor. The verse's bodily language is thus doing conceptual work: sinews are channels that connect the different parts of a living person. Here one channel cannot perform that task safely, so refraining from eating it becomes a way of honoring a spiritual limit (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5653).

• The Sfas Emes reads the Torah's explanation for not eating the gid hanasheh within the whole drama of Yaakov's struggle with Esav's angel. The text says that Yaakov emerged with the sun shining for him, yet he was limping on his thigh. He notices the apparent contradiction: if Yaakov triumphed and received an especially high illumination, why did an injured part remain? His answer begins by distinguishing Yaakov's personal spiritual power from the condition of his descendants. Yaakov himself could struggle all the way to the spiritual source of the conflict. But he deliberately bound his mission to the later generations, who would have to fight the same adversary from a lower condition. The conclusion follows from the Torah's "Therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the displaced sinew": the physical non-consumption marks a spiritual boundary left by the struggle. Refraining from eating the displaced sinew honors that spiritual boundary until the final redemption (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5645).

• The Sfas Emes offers a further interpretation of gid hanasheh while explaining Yaakov's return to Eretz Yisrael. The Sfas Emes explains that the aspect of strict judgment (din) connected with this sinew cannot be fully rectified until the future. The Torah therefore commands that this particular sinew not be eaten. This closely parallels the earlier Vayishlach teaching from (5645), which describes the injured sinew as a limit left for Yaakov's descendants. It nevertheless adds a distinct mechanism: positive acts draw in holy illumination, while prohibitions prevent that illumination from being diverted. The source explicitly connects the unrectified sinew to "Therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the displaced sinew", making it a substantive annual expansion rather than a merely decorative parallel (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5658).

• The name itself carries a drasha: the gid is called from forgetting, as in Yosef's firstborn Menashe ("for God has made me forget"). The Zohar, quoted in the Yom Kippur inyan, teaches that Yom Kippur stands opposite gid hamilah and, on the other side of the balance, Tisha B'Av stands opposite gid hanasheh. Two members of the body, two opposite essences: milah is the member of remembrance — and gid hanasheh is the member of forgetting, whose inner power is to make one forget the service of the Master of the world. The touch of Esav's angel fastened exactly upon that power: the foreign dominion implants in man the forgetting of his King's worship. Over against Esav's gift of oblivion stands milah — circumcision, the covenantal member of remembrance — which is why Yom Kippur, the day of standing in memory before Hashem, stands opposite the member of forgetting as its counterpart and its remedy, and why the Jew of Tisha B'Av's aftermath must keep his forgetfulness-giving member out of his mouth as carefully as he keeps the day's mourning out of Shabbos (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Yom Kippur 5652).

• In Parshas Vayishlach (5654), the Sfas Emes contemplates the Gemara's teaching (Chullin 91a) on the verse "And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn"—that Yaakov and the angel of Esav raised dust (avak) all the way to the Throne of Glory—followed by the Torah's conclusion, "Therefore the children of Israel do not eat the gid ha-nasheh." Because the image of Yaakov Avinu is engraved upon the Divine Throne of Glory, the Sitra Achra wars relentlessly against Yaakov's descendants in an effort to obscure the full manifestation of Hashem's Kingship in this lower world (yad al kes Kah). By abstaining from the sciatic sinew (gid ha-nasheh) that was touched in the darkness of that night, Klal Yisrael guards the point of vulnerability until the final dawn of redemption, when the dust of exile clears and the Throne is revealed in completeness (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5654).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

Discuss the Messianic Era, and what will occur then

A. NOT TO EAT THE CHELEV HAGID

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-3

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic prohibition not to consume the fat clinging to the sciatic nerve (chelev hagid), as Chazal enacted a protective fence around the biblical ban (Chullin 91a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 65:1).

SANCTIFYING THE FIRSTFRUITS & PRIESTLY PORTIONS

7. To Sanctify All Firstborn Animals (Bechor)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 53

As the Torah says, Consecrate to Me every firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast (Shemos 13:2, Parshas Bo)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How do we sanctify the firstborn?
- What if that wasn't said, is it not sanctified?
- What is done with the sanctified animal?
- What can we do with it today when we don't have a temple?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is a positive commandment to verbally sanctify a firstborn male of a kosher domestic animal by explicitly declaring: 'This is hereby consecrated as holy'; as Scripture states: 'All the firstborn males that are born of your herd and of your flock you shall sanctify to Hashem your God' (Devarim 15:19).

Nevertheless, even if the owner did not verbally consecrate it, the animal becomes holy automatically from the moment of birth (kadosh meirechem).

In our times, in the absence of the Holy Temple where sacrifices may be offered, the firstborn animal must be given to a kohen and allowed to graze in the pasture until it naturally develops a permanent disqualifying blemish (mum), after which it may be ritually slaughtered and consumed by the kohen.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

This mitzvah reminds us of the great miracles that occurred when Hashem took us out of Egypt, and how He saved the Jewish firstborn sons. That experience taught us the foundational ideas of Hashem's existence and involvement in the world, the fact that Hashem can communicate his will through prophecy, and how Hashem rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Remembering these ideas help us to devote our lives to the pursuit of perfecting our character though Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAN

During the plague of the firstborns, the Jewish firstborns were also deserving of being punished. They were saved, because Hashem wanted the firstborns in every family to devote their lives to serving Hashem by being a kohein. We express that devotion and commitment for the firstborn to be a kohein and eved Hashem, by declaring the firstborn kadosh.

SEFER HACHINUCH

By dedicating our precious firstborn sons to serving Hashem, we are expressing that all that we have, including our greatest gifts, comes from Hashem, and it is all to be used to serve Hashem.

SFAS EMES

• One of the most important principles in the Sfas Emes is that everything depends upon the beginning. A process may ultimately contain many parts, but the character of the whole is often determined by the point from which it began. The Sfas Emes applies this idea frequently to Bikkurim, Terumah, the Omer, and other mitzvos of firstness. In discussing the separation of the first portion, he writes that through separating the beginning, the remainder is clarified from its refuse. Elsewhere he states that to the extent that the beginning is given to the Creator, impurity does not become mixed into what follows. The Torah does not ask the Jew to reject the continuation. It teaches him how to establish the root from which the continuation can unfold properly (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5653).

• The Torah does not limit Kedushas Bechor to human beings. It says explicitly, "both in man and in beast, it is Mine." The Sfas Emes sees in these words a broader map of human existence. The categories of human being (adam) and animal (beheimah) exist not only outside the person but within him. Human life contains a higher spiritual faculty, associated with the neshamah and the distinctively human power of consciousness, as well as an animal vitality that supplies physical energy, appetite, strength, and practical action. The realm of animal (beheimah) must also be brought into the covenant. Kedushas Bechor begins that process by sanctifying the first expression of both (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5647).

• In a later maamar on Parshas Bo, the Sfas Emes gives the mitzvah an extraordinarily broad meaning. Yetzias Mitzrayim, he explains, brought a new kedushah into Klal Yisrael. Through the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael became vessels in which holiness could dwell, both collectively and individually. Yet holiness that exists in the inner identity of the nation still requires a concrete form through which it can become visible. The Bechor provides that expression. The Sfas Emes writes that the kedushah of Israel becomes recognizable in actual form through the Bechor. The second is obligation: the purpose of that hidden point is to become visible. The Bechor is the outward sign of an inner firstness that every Jew must uncover (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5653).

• The Sfas Emes understands Makkas Bechoros as the culmination of the entire sequence of makkos because it reached the root of Egyptian power. He writes that the plague of the firstborn struck the spiritual root of all their faculties (shoresh kol ha-kochos shelahem), the root from which the various powers of Egypt emerged. Once the root itself was broken, the Egyptian hold could no longer remain intact. This conception gives the Egyptian Bechor a meaning beyond family status. The Bechor is the sacred first-beginning (reishis) of the household and

therefore symbolizes the concentrated beginning from which later power spreads. The Bechor embodies the sacred first-beginning (reishis) of "Israel is My firstborn son" (beni bechori Yisrael), the root that was uncovered on the night Egypt's competing root was destroyed (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5636).

• One of the most profound teachings about Kedushas Bechor appears in the Sfas Emes's discussion of the four parshiyos contained in Tefillin. Their order begins with "Sanctify to Me" (kadesh li), followed by "And it shall be when Hashem brings you" (ve-hayah ki yevi'acha), and only afterward the Shema and "And it shall come to pass if you hearken" (ve-hayah im shamo'a). The Sfas Emes focuses upon the fact that "Sanctify to Me every firstborn" (Kadesh li kol bechor) precedes the parshah associated more explicitly with the historical experience of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The Bechor therefore stands at the entrance to the story of redemption and declares the principle upon which the rest depends: "the holiness of Israel to Hashem precedes everything else" (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5655).

A. NOT TO USE THE SANCTIFIED FIRSTBORN

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 29-83

As it says "do not do work with the firstborn of your ox and do not sheer the firstborn of your sheep" (Devarim 15:19, Parshas Re'eh).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can you sheer the wool of the animal?
- After it's killed, can one use the wool?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to perform labor with a firstborn animal or to shear its fleece, as Scripture states: 'You shall do no work with the firstborn of your ox, nor shear the firstborn of your sheep' (Devarim 15:19). The prohibition against shearing or working applies to all firstborn cattle, sheep, and goats, persisting even after the animal develops a permanent disqualifying blemish (mum). Furthermore, any wool shorn from them — even after they have been ritually slaughtered on account of their blemish — remains strictly forbidden for any benefit (issur hana'ah). If a non-Jew holds a shared ownership partnership in the animal — whether in the firstborn offspring itself, in its mother, or even in a single ear — the offspring is entirely exempt from the sanctity of the firstborn. The laws of the firstborn remain biblically binding in our times, both within Eretz Yisroel and throughout the Diaspora.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred involving an old firstborn male sheep whose unshorn wool hung down in long, heavy locks. A Roman officer (quaestor) saw it and asked: 'What is the nature of this ram that you leave its wool unshorn?' They replied: 'It is a sanctified firstborn animal (bechor), and it may not be slaughtered or shorn unless a bodily blemish develops on it.' The

Roman took a dagger and slit its ear so they could use it. The case came before the Sages, and they permitted it because the Roman had acted on his own, but when they saw that people might leave firstborn animals where gentiles would blemish them on purpose, the Sages decreed that such an animal may not be slaughtered.

Mishnah, Bechoros 5:3

B. NOT TO EAT THE SANCTIFIED FIRSTBORN

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 26-26

As it says "do not eat it in your gates" (Devarim 12:17, Parshas Re'eh).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to consume the meat of an unblemished firstborn animal (bechor tam), as an unblemished firstling may be eaten only by kohanim in Jerusalem after its sacrificial portions are offered upon the Altar (Devarim 12:17; Makkos 19b). The laws governing the sanctity of the firstborn remain fully in force in our times, applying both in Eretz Yisroel and in the Diaspora.

C. NOT TO GIVE IT A DISQUALIFYING BLEMISH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 29-47

As it says "there shall be no blemish in it (Vayikra 22:21, Parshas Emor)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to intentionally inflict a blemish upon a firstborn animal, as Scripture states regarding consecrated offerings: 'There shall be no blemish in it' (Vayikra 22:21) — which the Oral Tradition interprets as an explicit prohibition: 'You shall not cause a blemish in it' (Bechoros 33b). One may not inflict a defect upon a firstling even in our times in order to render it permissible for slaughter and consumption.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once some young children were playing out in the meadow and innocently tied the tails of several lambs together; one lamb pulled away and its tail was severed, and it turned out to be a sanctified firstborn lamb (bechor). When the case came before the Sages, they ruled it permitted because the children had acted innocently without intent to blemish a consecrated animal. However, when people saw that the Sages permitted it and began deliberately tying the tails of other firstborn lambs together, the Sages stepped in and forbade it.

Bechoros 35a

8. To Redeem All Firstborn Sons (Pidyon HaBen)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 54

As the Torah says, however, the firstborn son of a man you shall redeem (Bamidbar. 18:15, Parshas Korach).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How much is the son redeemed for?
- Does it need to be coins?
- Who gets the redemption fee?
- Can the Kohein use it to buy food, or non sacred items?
- Are all Jews obligated to redeem their firstborn son?
- What should be done if one's father never performed this redemption?
- How old should the child be when we do the redemption?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The biblical redemption of a firstborn son (pidyon haben) is effected with five silver selaim (shekels) of pure silver,

Or with movable property and merchandise possessing equivalent monetary value to five silver selaim (excluding real estate, promissory notes, or slaves);

This redemption payment must be presented directly to a kohen;

Upon transfer, the redemption money becomes entirely non-holy property (chullin) belonging fully to the kohen to use as he pleases.

If the father of the firstborn infant is a kohen or a Levite, or if the child's mother is the daughter of a kohen or a Levite (bas kohen or bas Levi), the father is completely exempt from the obligation to redeem his son.

The prescribed time for this redemption is after thirty days have elapsed from the child's birth (on the thirty-first day), as Scripture states: 'And their redemption — from a month old you shall redeem them' (Bamidbar 18:16).

If a firstborn son's father failed to redeem him, or if the child was fatherless, he becomes halachically obligated to redeem himself once he reaches adulthood.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

This mitzvah reminds us of the great miracles that occurred when Hashem took us out of Egypt, and how He saved the Jewish firstborn sons. That experience taught us the foundational ideas of Hashem's existence and involvement in the world, the fact that Hashem can communicate his will through prophecy, and how Hashem rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Remembering these ideas help us to devote our lives to the pursuit of perfecting our character though Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

When the bechorim are born they were sanctified to be kohanim and servants of Hashem. But because the kehuna was transferred to the leviyim because of their participation or lack of response at the chet haegel, we have to redeem them out of the natural kedushah that presses them into the service of the kohanim.

RABBEINU BACHYA

Just as this firstborn will never be given up by his parents, also the Jewish people who are Hashem's first born will never be given up and exchanged for another nation.

SFAS EMES

• The most basic difficulty appears in Parshas Bamidbar. Chazal teach that wherever the Torah uses the word, “Mine,” the relationship possesses permanence. Concerning the Bechorim, Hashem says “they shall be Mine.” The Sfas Emes therefore asks: if the Bechorim belong to Hashem permanently, how can their kedushah later be removed when Levi takes their place? His answer is direct: “the sanctity of the firstborn remains forever.” To explain the principle, the Sfas Emes compares the transfer to the halachah of Temurah. When an animal has already been consecrated and its owner attempts to substitute another animal for it, the original animal does not become ordinary. Pidyon HaBen therefore teaches that Hashem’s first claim upon Jewish life cannot be cancelled. The words “they shall be Mine” (li yihyu) continue to define the Bechor even after his practical role has changed (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Bamidbar 5650).

• Once the Sfas Emes establishes that the Bechor retains his kedushah, another question immediately follows. If the Bechor remains holy, why was Levi needed? The Sfas Emes answers by distinguishing between possessing a holy beginning and having the power to carry that beginning to completion. After the Chet HaEgel, he writes that the Bechorim lost the spiritual power (koach) required to complete their function. Their inner kedushah remained, but the ability to bring that kedushah into fully realized, sustained avodah had been damaged. Hashem therefore joined the Leviim to them. The Bechor is not removed from the story. He becomes the source from which Levi continues the story (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Bamidbar 5650).

• An earlier teaching in Parshas Bamidbar explains the same transfer through another distinction. The Sfas Emes explains that the transfer is designed to unite these two paths. He writes that the Leviim become complete through receiving the spiritual power (koach) of the Bechorim. The kedushah of Moshe’s Torah path requires the deeper inherited root of the Avos, while the inherited holiness of the Bechor requires the discipline of Torah if it is to become complete avodah. The exchange therefore does not replace one worldview with another. One begins with inherited kedushah, but inheritance is meant to become avodah. One receives an identity from the Avos and must then live that identity through Toras Moshe (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Bamidbar 5646).

• In Parshas Korach, the Sfas Emes explains why the Torah's sacred first-portions and redemptions are given specifically to the Kohen. When Bnei Yisrael elevate something to Hashem, His desire is that through this elevation He should be able to send them supernal lovingkindness (chesed elyon). He therefore concludes that the root of blessing is placed in the hands of the Kohen. The underlying structure is that giving the sacred first-beginning (reishis) upward creates the channel through which berachah returns downward. The holy beginning is raised toward Hashem, and through the Kohen it becomes part of the Divine flow of supernal lovingkindness (chesed elyon). Giving the redemption silver of the firstborn to the Kohen connects the child's beginning to the priestly channel of blessing (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5656).

• The Torah itself binds Pidyon HaBen to Yetzias Mitzrayim. The Sfas Emes explains that Yetzias Mitzrayim created a permanent change in Klal Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael became vessels capable of containing kedushah, collectively and individually. The declaration “Sanctify to Me every firstborn” made that inner change visible through the Bechor. Yet a revelation that took place once in history must continually be reactivated. The Sfas Emes therefore connects Kedushas Bechor with remembering the Exodus from Egypt (zechiras Yetzias Mitzrayim). Redeeming the firstborn son reactivates the sanctification of the Exodus in every generation, dedicating the beginning of family life to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5653).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

Discuss how the bechor still has to be the role model even though he is no longer an official kohein.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ On the twenty-fifth of Kislev (Meg Taanis 9), the Kutim told Alexander the Great that the Jews were rebellious subjects, and requested permission to destroy their Holy Temple. Alexander granted them permission. Shimon HaTzaddik was called to help, and as Alexander was riding toward Jerusalem, Shimon HaTzaddik donned the vestments of the Kohen Gadol and went with a group of important representatives, holding torches in their hands, to greet Alexander the Great. They waited for him all night, and at the crack of dawn, when Alexander saw them, he asked his servants, "Who are they?" His servants answered, "The Jews who rebelled against you." When the sun fully rose and Alexander saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he stepped off his chariot and prostrated himself before Shimon. His servants protested, "A mighty king like you should bow down before this Jew?" Alexander answered, "The image of this man triumphs before me on the theater of battle." Alexander asked them why they came to him, and they responded, "Is it possible that the house in which we pray that you and your empire should not be destroyed, pagans should convince you to destroy?" Alexander asked, "Who are they?" The Jews responded, "The Kutim who are standing before you." Alexander replied, "They are yours, to do with them as you wish." And they destroyed Mt. Gerizim, the dwelling place of the Kutim, just as the Kutim had desired to do to the Temple Mount.

Talmud Bavli, Yoma 69a; Megillas Taanis 9

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Meir Tzvi Bergman named his first child Ben Tzion. Before the pidyon haben, he went to the Chazon Ish to buy coins from him to give to the kohen, since it was well known that the Chazon Ish had such coins. When Rav Meir Tzvi bought the coins, the Chazon Ish hinted that after the pidyon haben, he should buy the coins back and return them to him. Rav Meir Tzvi said that he would. "Do not tell that to the kohen ahead of time," the Chazon Ish pointed out, "because if you say that, it will be a matanah al menas l'hachzir, and the pidyon haben must be a proper kinyan. Only after the pidyon haben has been performed should you go over to the kohen and buy back the coins." The day of the pidyon haben dawned.

Rav Avraham Mordechai Cohen, father of Rav Aharon Cohen of Chevron, was asked to serve as the kohen. Rav Avraham Mordechai, a tzaddik who worked as a rebbe of young children, also happened to be Rav Shach's neighbor. All the gedolim of Yerushalayim, as well as roshei yeshivah and talmidei chachamim, attended the pidyon haben. The house was too small for all the guests, and it was very crowded. Immediately after the pidyon haben, Rav Meir Tzvi intended to approach the kohen to tell him that he wanted to buy back the coins, but the kohen disappeared in the commotion. Only after they sat down for the seudah did Rav Meir Tzvi see him returning, and he hurried over. "I'd like to buy the coins back from you," he said. The kohen looked at him and felt bad. "It's a pity you didn't tell me earlier that you wanted them back. I went home and divided the coins among the pushkas that I have, and now the money is locked in there." Puzzled, Rav Meir Tzvi asked, "Why did you hurry to put the coins into the pushkas?" "I'm a rebbe, and I get paid for my work, but I cannot give tzedakah from that money because I am always concerned that I am not doing my job properly and that money would not be 'kosher money'. I am afraid that after one hundred and twenty years I will be asked in Shamayim, 'You gave tzedakah from that money?' But the money from the pidyon haben is definitely kosher money. Therefore, every time I get money from a pidyon haben, I hurry to give it to tzedakah." Rav Meir Tzvi returned to the Chazon Ish without the coins, explaining why he had not brought them back. The Chazon Ish heard the story and said, "He's an ehrlicher Yid." Since that incident, Rav Meir Tzvi took on the habit of giving to tzedakah any money that he finds on the street without simanim, saying that such money is certainly kosher and suitable for tzedakah.

From At His Table, Published by Tfutza Publications

9. Not to Redeem Firstborn Cattle

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 109

As the Torah says, But the firstling of an ox... you shall not redeem (Bamidbar 18:17, Parshas Korach)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Why was it not permitted to be redeemed?
- Can it be redeemed today when there is no temple and it can't be brought as a korban?
- If it is sold, can it be treated as a regular animal?
- What if it has a blemish, and could not be brought as an offering?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

In the absence of the Holy Temple, it is permissible for a kohen to sell an unblemished firstborn animal; however, the purchaser must conduct himself with the animal in strict accordance with the full sanctity of a firstborn.

Once a firstborn develops a permanent disqualifying blemish, it may be sold either alive or ritually slaughtered, provided that it is not sold in a public butcher market or weighed by retail scale, so that its sacred status is not degraded.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

This mitzvah reminds us of the great miracles that occurred when Hashem took us out of Egypt, and how He saved the Jewish firstborn sons. That experience taught us the foundational ideas of Hashem's existence and involvement in the world, the fact that Hashem can communicate his will through prophecy, and how Hashem rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Remembering these ideas help us to devote our lives to the pursuit of perfecting our character though Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RALBAG

Hashem would rather we bring the animal as a korban. Only firstborn human bechorim can be redeemed because they lost their chance to be kohanim.

10. To Redeem a Firstborn Donkey with a Lamb (Peter Chamor)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 55

As the Torah says, And the firstling of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb (Shemos 34:20, Parshas Ki Sisa); and he gives the lamb to the kohen, As the Torah says Everything that opens the womb… Shall be Yours (Bamidbar 18:15, Parshas Korach).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If a kohen or a levi had a firstborn donkey, do they have to redeem it?
- What should one do if they don't have a lamb?
- Does the value of the donkey and the lamb have to be similar?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Kohanim and Levites, however, are entirely exempt from this obligation to redeem a firstborn donkey (peter chamor).

If the owner does not possess a sheep or goat with which to redeem the donkey, he may redeem it with monetary funds corresponding to its fair value, giving that payment directly to the kohen.

Even if the firstborn donkey is worth ten silver selaim, the owner may redeem it with a lamb worth merely a single dinar; kohanim and Levites remain exempt from this obligation under all circumstances.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

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SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVOS 22, 34, 20)

The redemption of every male bechor is a reminder that the Jewish bechorim were saved by Hashem and they became kohanim as a result.

The redemption of the donkey is a reminder of the Egyptian bechorim who were killed. The firstborn donkey symbolizes the Egyptian firstborn. The sheep symbolizes the Jewish people. The donkey, the Egyptian Bechor, could have been saved if only they would have freed the sheep, the Jewish people, to serve Hashem. Because the "donkey" did not free the "sheep", then firstborn donkeys got killed. That is why we want to free and redeem the sheep to save the donkey.

SFAS EMES

• The uniqueness of the donkey demands explanation. Why does the Torah single out the donkey (chamor)? In his teachings on Yaakov's declaration, "And I have acquired an ox and a donkey," the Sfas Emes explains that a person must first repair the animal aspect of his being. He speaks of "rectifying the animal soul" and of attaining "freedom from physicality and coarse matter." The mitzvos are performed through the partnership of the body, and the lower powers therefore require their own spiritual rectification (tikkun). Peter Chamor teaches that the work of holiness does not stop at the boundary of the spiritual personality. It descends into the weight of physical existence itself (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5655).

• This teaching explains why the donkey (chamor) is an appropriate symbol. The act of redemption (pidyon) adds another principle. The Torah does not command that the firstborn donkey simply be discarded because it is non-kosher. Its firstness has value. That sacred first-beginning (reishis) must be redeemed. The Sfas Emes's language concerning physicality is consistently the language of spiritual rectification (tikkun). He speaks of the obligation "to rectify physical matter" (le-takein ha-chomriyus), repairing materiality through the power of the neshamah. The spiritual task is not limited to what is already refined. The Jew is asked to discover and redeem the holy beginning even within the coarse and resistant parts of life (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5655).

• Chazal give a direct reason for the donkey's unique status. The Gemara in Bechoros asks why the donkey was singled out from all non-kosher animals and answers that the donkeys assisted Bnei Yisrael at Yetzias Mitzrayim. They carried the silver and gold taken from Egypt. Chazal describe the abundance dramatically: there was no Jew who did not leave with many donkeys laden with Egyptian wealth. The Sfas Emes gives that wealth a profound spiritual meaning. The physical world is filled with possessions, energies, talents, and resources whose ultimate spiritual identity depends upon how they are carried and where they are brought. The donkey that bore Egypt's wealth into Jewish freedom becomes the emblem of a material world capable of being redirected toward Hashem (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5647).

• The first foundation is the general meaning of first-opening of the womb (peter rechem). In Parshas Bo, the Sfas Emes explains the command through the idea of beginning (haschalah). Yetzias Mitzrayim itself was the great beginning of Jewish avodah: Bnei Yisrael were entering for the first time into the revealed Malchus of Hashem. The Torah therefore attaches this historical beginning to the biological beginning represented by the first opening of the womb. The first emergence of life is holy because all life begins from a source beyond the creature that possesses it. The physical realm can develop properly only when its beginning remembers where it came from (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5641).

• The entire mitzvah is rooted in Makkas Bechoros. The Torah itself explains Peter Chamor through the night on which Hashem struck every Egyptian firstborn and spared the firstborn of Israel. The Sfas Emes gives that event a meaning that reaches far beyond the death of individual Egyptian firstborns. He describes Makkas Bechoros as the destruction of "the spiritual root of all their faculties." The Bechor of Egypt represented the root from which Egyptian power spread. The physical world appears heavy and self-sufficient; Peter Chamor declares that its sacred first-beginning (reishis) is answerable to Hashem. Egypt's claim over physical matter (chomer) is broken, and the Jewish task is to redeem physical matter (chomer) by restoring it to its source (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Bo 5636).

11. To Break the Neck of an Unredeemed Firstborn Donkey (Arifas Chamor)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 56

As the Torah says, and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck (Shemos 34:20, Parshas Ki Sisa).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How is its neck supposed to be broken?
- Can you use any type of knife?
- Can one benefit from the carcass after it is killed?
- What should be done to the carcass?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The biblical requirement of 'breaking its neck' (arifah) means striking the animal at the back of its neck with a butcher's cleaver (kofitz) until it dies.

This must be carried out specifically with a butcher's cleaver and no other implement, and the animal may not be put to death through any alternative method.

It is strictly forbidden to derive any form of benefit (hana'ah) from the animal, both during its life and after its neck has been broken.

The carcass requires full burial in the earth, and even its ashes remain permanently forbidden for benefit if it is burned.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women; kohanim and Levites, however, are exempt from this obligation.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

This mitzvah reminds us of the great miracles that occurred when Hashem took us out of Egypt, and how He punished the Egyptian firstborn sons. That experience taught us the foundational ideas of Hashem's existence and involvement in the world, the fact that Hashem can communicate his will through prophecy, and how Hashem rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Remembering these ideas help us to devote our lives to the pursuit of perfecting our character though Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVOS 22, 34, 20)

The redemption of every male bechor is a reminder that the Jewish bechorim were saved by Hashem and they became kohanim as a result.

The redemption of the donkey is a reminder of the Egyptian bechorim who were killed. The firstborn donkey symbolizes the Egyptian firstborn. The sheep symbolizes the Jewish people. The donkey, the Egyptian Bechor, could have been saved if only they would have freed the sheep, the Jewish people, to serve Hashem. Because the "donkey" did not free the "sheep", then firstborn donkeys got killed. Killing the donkey is a reminder of makas bechoros.

SFAS EMES

• The Torah's law presents only two possibilities: The firstborn donkey is either redeemed or its neck is broken. The Torah does not offer a third path in which the owner simply declines the mitzvah and keeps the animal as an ordinary work animal. The Sfas Emes's treatment of donkey (chamor) and materiality (chomriyus) explains the

spiritual logic of this absolute choice. He repeatedly associates the donkey (chamor) with physical matter (chomer), and describes the task of avodah as rectifying physical matter and the animal soul (tikkun ha-chomriyus ve-nefesh ha-beheimis). Matter matters because it has a Divine purpose. It cannot be granted unlimited freedom to define its own purpose once its sacred first-beginning (reishis) has been claimed by Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5655).

• The strongest linguistic key appears in the Sfas Emes's discussion of the verse "May my teaching drop like the rain" (ya'arof ka-matar likchi) in Parshas Haazinu. The Sfas Emes explains that Torah softens the human heart just as rain softens hardened earth. Torah removes the stiff-necked stubbornness (kashyus oref) of the yetzer hara, and this is why the word "shall drop as rain" (ya'arof) also carries a meaning of breaking the neck. This language provides an unusually precise framework for "you shall break its neck" (va-arafto). The problem symbolized by the back of the neck (oref) is not ordinary physicality. When it becomes stiff-necked (kasheh oref), insisting upon its own autonomous claim even after its source has been revealed, the Torah responds by breaking the very back of the neck (oref) that symbolizes the refusal (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ha'azinu 5641).

• A second teaching of the Sfas Emes explains why the symbolic location of the neck is so significant. The Sfas Emes explains that when the bodily covering no longer obstructs the soul, the inner person naturally recognizes Divinity (Elokus). The spiritual problem is therefore not the existence of a body. The problem is the body becoming an outer surface (chitzoniyus) so thick that the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) can no longer govern it. This fits the Peter Chamor with remarkable precision. The outer world must eventually be brought into alignment with the inner one. Physical matter (chomer) that refuses that alignment loses its right to remain an autonomous spiritual vessel (kli) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5656).

• Chazal provide a direct explanation for the economic severity of Arifah. In Parshas Korach, the Sfas Emes explains the significance of giving sacred first-beginning (reishis) and Terumah to the Kohen. He writes, "giving the first-fruits and uplifted portion to the kohen" and cites the principle "Hashem acquired it and granted it to the kohen." The gift first belongs to Hashem and is then given by Him to the Kohen. The movement through the Kohen is part of a larger spiritual economy. A person does not preserve his wealth by severing it from Hashem. He preserves the possibility of blessing precisely by releasing the sacred first-beginning (reishis) (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5656).

• A final dimension emerges from the Sfas Emes's treatment of the Torah's other major law of breaking the neck (arifah): Eglah Arufah. The cases are halachically distinct, and the Sfas Emes does not explicitly connect his explanation of Eglah Arufah to Peter Chamor. Nevertheless, his interpretation reveals a broader spiritual meaning of the act of breaking the neck (arifah) itself. Chazal explain that the Eglah is brought to a barren valley, a place that is neither worked nor sown, because the murdered person was prevented from producing future mitzvos. When a person insists upon keeping them severed from their purpose, he may possess the spiritual power (koach) temporarily while losing the fruit for which it was created (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5651).

12. To Give the First of the Shearing to a Kohen (Reishis HaGez)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 52

As the Torah says, and the first of the fleece of your sheep you shall give him (Devarim 18:4, Parshas Shoftim).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How much wool must be given?
- Would this apply for the leather of a cow?
- Do you have to give 1/60 no matter how many sheep you own?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The rabbinically mandated measure for the first of the shearing (reishis hagez) is one-sixtieth (1/60th) of the total fleece;

And this obligation applies exclusively to sheep, excluding all other wool- or hair-bearing animals;

And provided that one shears a minimum flock of five sheep, each producing a fleece weighing not less than twelve selaim, so that their combined wool yield totals at least sixty selaim.

This mitzvah shares the identical halachic applicability as the priestly gifts (matanos kehunah), as detailed above in Section 51.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

When we give the first of our shearing to the kohen, one who devotes his life to learning and teaching Torah, we are symbolically expressing that the primary purpose of our resources should be to sustain and support Torah in the world. This symbolic commitment inspires us to use all that we have to perfect our character through Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RALBAG

By giving the first of the wool, or the first of our food to support Torah and the kohanim, we express that all that we have comes from Hashem, and all that we have should be used to serve Hashem.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 408)

Wool is used to make clothing. We want to give the first of our wool to the kohanim to support them and their Torah learning.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:39)

Giving away the first of anything is the hardest because it is the most precious. By giving the first away we strengthen the quality of generosity, and minimize miserliness.

SFAS EMES

• The material of Reishis HaGez is not incidental. The Sfas Emes explains that the human body itself is a garment for the soul. The mitzvos were given to repair man's garment. The 248 limbs of the body are an outer garment (levush) for the corresponding dimensions of the soul (nefesh). The task of mitzvos is therefore not limited to the inner soul. The inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) must acquire a proper outer surface (chitzoniyus). Reishis HaGez can therefore be understood as sanctifying the material from which the outer human garment is formed, so that outer surface (chitzoniyus) may remain connected to inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Tetzaveh 5644).

• The fundamental principle is stated repeatedly by the Sfas Emes: "everything depends upon the first-beginning." In his teachings on the Omer and other mitzvos of sacred first-beginning (reishis), the Sfas Emes explains that the material world contains mixtures of good and spiritual dross (pesolet). The role of the first portion is to establish a point of purity before the remainder spreads outward: "and through separating the sacred first-portion, the remainder is purified of all dross." The fleece that will become commerce, comfort, and clothing first acquires its orientation through a gift to Hashem's servant. Once the sacred first-beginning (reishis) has been properly separated, the remaining material world can become usable without becoming spiritually detached (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5660).

• In this teaching, the Sfas Emes explains why the Torah separates the sacred first-beginning (reishis). A second question remains: why is the first wool given specifically to the Kohen? The Sfas Emes answers this question in a broader discussion of Matnos Kehunah. In Parshas Korach he writes: The sacred first-beginning (reishis) and the Terumah belong to the Kohen. He then cites the teaching: "Hashem acquired it and granted it to the kohen." This formulation means that the gift does not move directly from one private owner to another. The first wool belongs in the Kohen's hands because the Torah has constructed the Kohen as the vessel through whom sacred first-beginning (reishis) returns to Israel as blessing. The mitzvah thus teaches an enduring principle: the material world becomes secure when its first point remains open toward Heaven (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5656).

• Chazal add an important halachic dimension to Reishis HaGez. The wool given to the Kohen must be material fit for priestly service (ra'ui le-sheirus). The Torah places the mitzvah beside the description of the Kohen as the one chosen "to stand and minister in the Name of Hashem." Chazal derive that the gift must be of the kind from which a useful priestly garment can be made. This detail gives the mitzvah a concrete relationship to avodah. The first wool is not only valuable merchandise transferred to a Kohen. The mitzvah thus gives ordinary labor a direction. Its highest possibility is not only successful production but becoming connected to service of Hashem (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Tetzaveh 5651).

• The first four dimensions focus on the gift and what it accomplishes for the giver. The Sfas Emes explains this through the unique place of Kohen and Levi within Klal Yisrael. They do not receive an ordinary territorial inheritance in the same form as the other tribes. "I am your portion and your inheritance" (Ani chelkecha ve-nachalasecha)—"they merited to eat from the Table of the Most High" (mi-shulchan Gavo'ah zachu). Their separation from ordinary inheritance expresses a national need. Klal Yisrael requires people whose lives visibly

demonstrate that avodas Hashem can be the central organizing principle of existence. The first fleece does not disappear from productive use. It becomes the support of another kind of productivity—the avodah of the Kohen (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5656).

13. To Separate Challah (Hafrashas Challah)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 57

As the Torah says, Of the first of your dough you shall set apart, challah (Bamidbar 15:20, Parshas Shelach)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If someone makes bread out of corn, do they have to separate challah?
- How much dough must one make to be obligated in challah?
- Is the separation of challah a biblical mitzvah in all areas?
- What should be done with the separated challah?
- How much dough do you have to separate?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If the dough is kneaded from flour of one of the five primary species of grain (wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats);

And the volume of the dough equals or exceeds the capacity of forty-three and one-fifth eggs (ke'beitzah), one is obligated to separate challah — a designated portion taken from the dough.

In all lands outside Eretz Yisroel, challah must be separated by rabbinic decree, ensuring that the sacred procedure of separating challah is never forgotten from the consciousness of Klal Yisroel;

And because everyone today is presumed to be ritually impure, this separated portion may not be eaten by a kohen, but must instead be respectfully burned.

By biblical law (m'd'Oraisa), there is no fixed minimum quantity for this separation; rather, taking any portion of dough of any size whatsoever suffices to fulfill the biblical obligation.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

When we give the first of our dough to the kohen, one who devotes his life to learning and teaching Torah, we are symbolically expressing that the primary purpose of our resources should be to sustain and support Torah in the world. This symbolic commitment inspires us to use all that we have to perfect our character through Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RALBAG

By giving the first of our food to support Torah and the kohanim, we express that all that we have comes from Hashem, and all that we have should be used to serve Hashem.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 385)

We want to give the first of our dough to the kohanim to support them and their Torah learning. Giving challah helps to save the time of the kohen so that he can be preoccupied with matters of Torah. This saves him from the time needed to sift, grind, knead and bake bread.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:39)

Giving away the first of anything is the hardest because it is the most precious. By giving the first away we strengthen the quality of generosity, and minimize miserliness.

SFAS EMES

• In 5645, the Sfas Emes explains how the separation of one portion can affect the bread that remains. He writes: The portion upon which the Name of Heaven rests raises the entire bread. Challah is therefore not only the removal of one sacred portion from an otherwise ordinary mass. The sacred first-beginning (reishis) becomes the point through which the whole receives spiritual ascent (aliyah). This idea belongs to the broader Sfas Emes principle that the spiritual character of a process is determined at its beginning. The small portion that leaves the dough is therefore not isolated from what remains. It carries the remainder upward with it (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5645).

• The first explanation appears in 5641. The Sfas Emes reads the mitzvah of Challah as the Torah's direct answer to the spiritual mistake of the Meraglim. Their preference for the Midbar was understandable. There they received bread from Heaven; in Eretz Yisrael they would eat bread from the earth. Yet the Sfas Emes writes that precisely through eating earthly bread, Klal Yisrael would acquire a new ability to raise the lower world. The mitzvah of Challah introduces the mature avodah of Eretz Yisrael, in which man must uncover holiness from within the processes of nature and labor. The descent into physical life is justified by the possibility of raising that life back to its source (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5641).

• The Sfas Emes pays close attention to the Torah's phrase "When you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set aside an offering." The pasuk could have described only the production of dough, yet it emphasizes "when you eat" (be-ochlechem). From here the Sfas Emes explains: The act of eating itself contains an avodah of raising holy sparks (nitzotzos). Food appears to the senses as physical matter. Yet according to the Sfas Emes, every created thing exists because Divine life-force (chiyus) is present within it. Eating becomes a spiritual task because the human being receives that divine life-force (chiyus) into himself. If the food is consumed only for physical appetite, its inner point remains concealed beneath the material form. Separating challah elevates our daily bread so that rather than consuming mere physical matter, the mouth reconnects the vitality within our food to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5641).

• In 5649, the Sfas Emes expands the mitzvah beyond the episode of the Meraglim and places it within the history of Adam HaRishon. The reason, he explains, is that true joy exists when things are raised back to their source. The curse of Adam was therefore deeper than agricultural hardship. Food became a burden of survival and an arena in which the human being (ha-adam) could experience himself as distant from the Creator. Challah restores the missing relationship by taking the beginning of the bread and returning it to the spiritual root (shoresh). Where the curse said "in toil you shall eat of it" (be-itzavon tochalenah), the repaired state can say "Go, eat your bread in joy" (echol be-simchah lachmecha). The physical bread remains, but its relationship to the Creator changes, and with that change comes joy (simchah) (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5649).

• The same maamar distinguishes between the nourishment of the body and the nourishment of the soul. The Sfas Emes writes: Torah is the primary nourishment of the nefesh, while food sustains the body. The human being requires both, but they cannot stand on equal terms. The body is meant to serve the deeper life of the neshamah, and bodily nourishment must therefore be ordered beneath the nourishment of Torah. The Sfas Emes connects this with Netilas Yadayim before eating: The hands represent the realm of external physical activity. The mitzvah therefore belongs to a larger discipline of eating in the Sfas Emes: Netilas Yadayim, Torah at the table, berachos, and Challah all create a structure in which bodily nourishment is integrated into spiritual life. Bread sustains the physical body (guf), but Torah determines what that physical body (guf) is for (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5641).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A woman separated a portion of dough for the mitzvah of Challah with the proper blessing and set it aside to be burned in accordance with contemporary halachah. Before she could burn it, a dog snatched the dough and devoured it. Is she halachically required to separate Challah a second time from the remaining dough, or was her obligation fully discharged the moment the portion was initially designated?

Answer: If the separated piece of challah dough was snatched away by a bird or lost after separation, the Birkei Yosef (Yoreh De'ah 322:2) rules that nowadays, since challah is burned rather than given to a Kohen, the obligation was already fulfilled at the moment of separation. However, if the separated challah piece fell back into the unbaked batch of dough, it is an actual piece of sacred challah (tevel/challah) mixed into the dough; unless the batch is large enough to nullify it (101 times the piece) or a rabbi performs hataras nedarim on the original separation, the mixture is forbidden as midras/meduma.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 318

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ When Reb Moshe Feinstein and his family arrived in America in 1936, there was only one kosher bakery on the Lower East Side. Reb Moshe knew that the proprietor was a sincere Orthodox Jew, but this did not mean that he was knowledgeable in the halachos that a baker needs to know. Specifically, he did not know whether or not the bakery fulfilled the mitzvah of separating challah from each dough. Reb Moshe pondered the matter until he came up with a way of determining this without insulting the owner. He entered the store, greeted the owner, and said, "Our family has just arrived in America. Since coming here, my wife has yet to fulfill the mitzvah of hafrashas challah. Would it be possible for her to come to the bakery every so often to do this mitzvah?" From the owner's response, it was obvious that the bakery fulfilled this mitzvah regularly.

Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Kanievskys, along with many others, endured profound poverty during their early years in Eretz Yisrael. Almost every Shabbos, they fulfilled the dictum, "Asei Shabbos'cha chol, v'al titztareich labrios, forgo any special delicacies for Shabbos rather than ask others for assistance." On most Shabbosos, their meal consisted of only challah, without any Shabbos delicacies. Special Shabbosos saw the addition of a can of sardines, but they almost never had chicken or meat. Due to its financial difficulties, the Steipler's yeshivah was frequently late in paying his salary, so Rebbetzin Miriam would have to borrow small sums of money on Erev Shabbos just to be able to buy challah. One day, the Steipler asked the talmidim to come to his house to hear the shiur. When they arrived, the Steipler was in bed, covered with a blanket. At the conclusion of the shiur, the students inquired about his health. He replied that he was fine. He had given the shiur in his home for a very practical reason: he owned only one pair of trousers (for both Shabbos and weekdays), which had ripped, and he was waiting for his wife to return home and mend them!

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

14. To Give the Foreleg, Cheeks, and Stomach to a Kohen (Matnos Kehunah)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 51

As the Torah says, he shall give the kohen the foreleg and the two cheeks and the maw (Devarim 18:3, Parshas Shoftim)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Do you give the Kohen the tongue?
- Should you take off the skin and fur before you give it to the Kohen?
- Can the kohen sell this meat?
- Can he feed it to a dog?
- Does this mitzvah apply in the Diaspora?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

These three priestly gifts (matanos kehunah) consist of: the right foreleg (zero'a) extending from the knee joint upward through the shoulder, comprising two connected limb joints; the cheeks (lechayayim), extending from the jaw joint to the thyroid cartilage of the windpipe, including the tongue nestled between them;

These parts must not be skinned or plucked, but presented to the kohen with their hide and wool intact; and the fourth stomach or maw (keivah), together with the fat adhering to its outer and inner surfaces, although kohanim customarily yielded this fat to the owner.

These portions are universally designated throughout Talmudic literature as the 'priestly gifts' (matanos kehunah). A kohen possesses the full halachic right to sell these gifts or even feed them to animals, for they carry no intrinsic sanctity (kedushah) whatsoever.

A kohen is likewise entitled to give these gifts to a non-kohen friend who is enduring financial hardship, permitting him to eat them without restriction.

In our times, common practice in the Diaspora follows the ruling of Rabbi Ila'i (Talmud Bavli, Chullin 136b), who held that the obligation to give these priestly gifts does not apply outside the Land of Israel; within Eretz Yisroel, however, the obligation remains fully in force. Even in the Diaspora, exceptionally pious individuals act stringently by giving them to a kohen, and it is most worthy and praiseworthy to do so in order to fulfill this biblical positive commandment.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Each of these mitzvos in the category of Edut have lessons that inspire us to become more committed to the Torah, more committed to our relationship with Hashem, and consequently inspire us to perfect our middos to become more G-dlike. In addition to the lesson behind each symbol, this mitzvah gives us a hashpa that sanctifies us to become more committed to the Torah, and more disciplined over our impulses.

These three parts of the animal are given as a reward for the great act of standing up for Hashem that Pinchas displayed when he stopped Zimri's public desecration of Hashem name. This reminds us to similarly stand up against acts of chilul Hashem. In addition it reminds us that the mitzvos that we do will bring merit to all of our descendants for posterity. This symbol therefore inspires us to devote our lives to perfecting our character though Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

GEMARA CHULIN 132

Giving away the zero'a symbolizes the hand of Pinchas that acted zealously for Hashem, the cheeks (lechayayim) symbolize his prayer, and the stomach (keivah) symbolizes the inner purity that defeated Midian.

Lechaim symbolizes the mouth of Pinchas that davened, and the keiva symbolizes the area that Pinchas pierced with his spear. (This reminds us to similarly act to stop chilul Hashem).

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 506)

By giving three parts of the animal that remind us of Pinchas, we symbolize that because of what Pinchas did, he brought blessing to all of his descendants until the end of time. This is a lesson for all of us, that the good choices that we make will bring blessing and merit to all of our descendants.

IBN EZRA (DEVARIM 18:3)

These parts are the most choice parts of the animal and they should be given to the kohanim.

Additionally they are payment for the shechitah of the offerings that the kohanim do. The zeroa (arm) is payment for the shechitah, the lechayim (mouth) is payment for the berachah, and the Keiva (innards) is the payment for the bedika on the inside of the animal that the kohein performs.

RAMBAM

These pieces are the bikurim, the first parts of each of the sections of the animal. The Lechaim is from the head. The forelegs are the first of the torso, and the keiva is the first of the innards.

RALBAG

Giving the hand, stomach and mouth symbolizes that the Jewish people's main power (hand) and support (stomach) come from the Kohanim's teachings (mouth).

ABARBANEL

These three gifts symbolize that kohanim atone for speech (mouth), actions (hand), and inner thoughts and character (innards).

SFAS EMES

• There is also a national and practical purpose to Matnos Kehunah. Hashem says, "I am your portion and your inheritance" (Ani chelkecha ve-nachalasecha). The Sfas Emes explains that Kohanim and Leviim occupy a different place within the economic structure of Klal Yisrael because their primary function is avodah. He describes them with the expression that their livelihood comes from the Table of the Most High. The phrase does not mean that physical means of sustenance are unnecessary; rather, the physical means themselves are reorganized as part of their sacred role. The foreleg (zero'a), the cheeks (lechayayim), and the maw (keivah) are therefore simultaneously symbolic organs and practical sustenance. The same meat that feeds the Kohen also declares that Israel's economic life is obligated to support its spiritual center (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5656).

• The third gift, the maw gift to the kohen (keivah), is associated by Chazal with the Torah's description of Pinchas striking Zimri and Kozbi, "and the woman through her stomach." The Sfas Emes's treatment of the episode provides the conceptual framework for this association. After discussing the power of the mouth (koach ha-peh), he explains that the expression "a two-edged sword" (cherev pifiyos) alludes to two covenants: Pinchas embodied both Bris HaLashon and Bris HaMaor. The crisis that Pinchas confronted concerned the sanctity of the bodily covenant. Zimri's sin was not only a private failure of desire; it represented the breaching of the boundary by which the physical power of sexuality remains attached to kedushah and to the distinct covenantal identity of Israel. Pinchas became Kohen through an act that defended precisely this principle. His Kehunah therefore carries within it the message that the body too can become a vessel of covenant (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5649).

• The final dimension arises from the moment at which the mitzvah takes effect. He explains that the mitzvos protect and refine the bodily limbs so that animal vitality remains subordinate to the neshamah. The physical side of man is necessary; without it, no mitzvah can be performed in Olam Hazeh. Yet the same vitality can become dominant if it is allowed to function without spiritual order. Eating meat brings this tension into a particularly concrete form. The human being takes the body of an animal and incorporates it into his own body. Physical strength, speech, and bodily vitality must all remain subordinate to the covenant. Even the food through which those powers are physically sustained must first acknowledge that order (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeira 5655).

• The previous dimensions explain why these particular organs are significant. A further question remains: why are they given specifically to a Kohen? The answer is bound to the transformation of Pinchas himself. The outward form of his deed was holy zeal (kana'us), an act of intense confrontation. Yet his reward was "My covenant of peace" (brisi shalom), and through that act he entered Kehunah. The Sfas Emes emphasizes that Pinchas did not remain defined by strict judgment (din). He writes that through his holy zeal (kana'us) he

reached a level of love and Chesed. He became a Kohen because his power was completely subordinated to Hashem and therefore became an instrument of peace and harmony (shalom). The gifts that commemorate his deed are accordingly handed to the Kohen, the human embodiment of that transformation (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5631).

• The first gift is the foreleg (zero'a). Chazal connect it to the words "And he took a spear in his hand" (va-yikach romach be-yado): Pinchas took the spear in his hand, and the hand that acted becomes the archetype behind the gift of the arm to the Kohen. The Sfas Emes pays close attention to the Torah's apparently unnecessary word "in his hand" (be-yado). A spear is naturally taken by hand; the Torah would seem to gain nothing by telling us so. His greatness lay in the complete unity between the outward deed and the inward service of Hashem. The gift of the foreleg (zero'a) therefore becomes the permanent sign of action that has been purified of independent ego and turned into mitzvah (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5654).

SEDER EIGHT • SECTION THREE: MITZVOS OF THE MIND AND HEART

TOROS: INTERNAL DIRECTIVES OF FAITH

Internalizing Divine Consciousness, Love, Reverence, and Trust

OVERVIEW

The next category of mitzvos is called Toros. All of these mitzvos have the purpose of helping us build a close, respectful, and intimate relationship with Hashem. A proper relationship with Hashem will be the fuel and motivating force that drives us to properly fulfill the mitzvos. If this relationship is not properly developed, we will not be sufficiently driven to devote our lives to fulfill the mitzvos and perfect our character. These mitzvos give us the passion and the drive to become G-dly.

The Toros are all mitzvos of the heart. These are mitzvos such as the mitzvah of knowing the Almighty exists, of loving the Almighty, of revering the Almighty, of trusting in the Almighty, of respecting the Almighty, and not worshiping false gods. These mitzvos of the heart give us the fuel and drive to achieve our goal.

It is important to appreciate the fundamental importance of these mitzvos. The mitzvos in this category form the very foundation of the entire Torah. Belief in Hashem underlies the very purpose of mitzvos which is to allow us to create an intimacy with Hashem. A deep love and reverence for Hashem, are not only motivators to inspire us to perform mitzvos, but they are also part of the goal of mitzvos. The purpose of mitzvos are for us to feel a dveikus, an intimacy with Hashem, and love and reverence are an important component of Dveikut.

Often the result of the influence accessed by a mitzvah of Edus will be one of these mitzvos. For example, the spiritual influence of Succos is Bitachon, trust in the Almighty, which is one of the mitzvos of the heart. Another influence from Pesach is Ahavas Hashem, which is also one of the mitzvos of the heart.

RELATING TO HASHEM: FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH & LOVE

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all deal with building a relationship with Hashem with mitzvos of the heart. This relationship is the basis of perfecting our character in order to come close to Hashem.

1. To Know That Hashem Exists

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 1

As the Torah says I am Hashem your God, etc. (Shemos 20:2, Parshas Yisro).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What are we being commanded to believe in this mitzvah?
- Can one be an observant Jew and not believe this?
- What are the consequences of not believing this?
- If we are will be imprisoned or killed because of our belief in Hashem, can one give it up?
- Does one have to find evidence of the existence of Hashem?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

We are commanded to know and believe with complete certainty that Hashem brought all existing entities and all the worlds into being solely through His supreme power and sovereign will.

He alone sustains, governs, and exercises active Divine providence (hashgachah pratis) over all creation.

This conviction serves as the foundational pillar and cornerstone of our entire faith (ikkar ha-emunah).

Whoever rejects this truth denies the primary fundamental principle of the Torah (kofer b'ikkar), forfeiting his portion and rightful standing among the Jewish people (Klal Yisroel).

A person is halachically obligated to surrender his very life and all his resources (mesiras nefesh) rather than violate this fundamental belief.

The essential core of this commandment is to anchor firmly within one's heart and soul that this is the absolute reality, and that no other existence is conceivable.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The only way we can devote our entire lives to perfecting our character to come close to Hashem, is if we know that Hashem exists, and think about him as much as we can. This mitzvah is the foundation of all of the mitzvos which help to perfect our character.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 25)

This mitzvah is the foundation of the entire Torah.

RAMBAN

Just as people must accept a king as their king before they can accept his laws, also we must accept Hashem as our Sovereign before we can accept the other mitzvos. This mitzvah is a prerequisite to all other mitzvos.

IBN EZRA (SHEMOS 20:2)

This is so that we know Hashem, and love Him, and attach ourselves to him, and never turn away.

DAAS ZEKEINIM IBID

Know for a fact that Hashem is the one commanding the mitzvos, and he will repay the good that we do, as well as the bad.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 1)

Our inner neshamah is never satisfied with physical pleasures, because an elevated soul cannot be satiated by worldly vanities. It is like a royal princess married to a simple peasant: whatever mundane delicacies he offers her, she remains unfulfilled because she remembers the royal palace from which she came. This innate spiritual dissatisfaction is itself proof that the physical world is not our ultimate destination.

SFAS EMES

• The first teaching is perhaps the most fundamental. The Sfas Emes makes the striking observation that the opening declaration at Sinai, "I am Hashem your God" (Anochi), is far more than a command like the commandments that follow; it is an empowering promise and bestowal of connection. Hashem is first declaring a permanent reality: Before the Jew does anything, Hashem says, "I am your God." This relationship is therefore deeper than the Jew's present spiritual level. A person may conceal it through sin, but the underlying bond was established by Hashem Himself. A word spoken by Hashem creates reality. "I am Hashem" (Anochi) created an everlasting relationship between Hashem and Israel (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5635).

• When the Torah says "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad), the Sfas Emes explains that Oneness (echad) means more than the numerical statement that there is one Hashem. He writes: Whatever exists receives its very existence and divine life-force (chiyus) from Hashem. The physical world appears to consist of millions of separate beings, forces, desires, and events. Emunah teaches the person to look beneath that multiplicity and recognize one Source of life. The hammer seems to strike, the doctor seems to heal, the employer seems to

provide, and the human being seems to act independently. The forms are many; the ultimate divine life-force (chiyus) is one. Emunah therefore changes the way a Jew understands reality itself (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

• Earlier we saw that the utterance "I am Hashem" (Anochi) planted a permanent Divine vitality (chiyus Elokus) within every Jew. The Sfas Emes also describes another process: the degree to which this life becomes revealed and received depends upon the person's emunah. Emunah is therefore not only the intellectual recognition of a fact: It is a living connection to the Source of life. The stronger the attachment, the more the Divine governance (hanhagah) becomes revealed to the person and the more deeply he receives his life from its true Source. This helps explain Chavakuk's statement, "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Chavakuk 2:4): the Sfas Emes reads the relationship between "faith" (emunah) and "he shall live" (yichyeh) quite literally: emunah is a channel of spiritual life (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Beshalach 5651).

• Hashem rules Creation whether human beings recognize Him or not. Yet there is a difference between divine kingship (malchus) that exists and divine kingship (malchus) that is revealed. The Sfas Emes writes that the more Klal Yisrael accepts Hashem's kingship, the more His kingship becomes visible throughout Creation. This is how he understands Chazal's teaching that Klal Yisrael are the people who "crown Him, blessed be He, as King"—revealing the King to His world. The Jew is not believing only for his own spiritual comfort. By recognizing Hashem inside a world that hides Him, he helps reveal what the whole world was created to know: that Hashem is its King and Source (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5635).

• The Sfas Emes says this explicitly: In Egypt, Klal Yisrael believed before the redemption had become visible. Their greatness was that they trusted in the promise during the darkness of exile, fulfilling the verse "To declare Your kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights" (Tehillim 92:3). Day corresponds to revelation; night is the time when the truth is present but cannot be seen. Galus is a historical night. Personal life also contains such nights, periods in which Hashem's plan is hidden and the person does not understand what is happening. Emunah is the faculty created for those moments. Its greatness lies precisely in remaining attached when there is no visible proof that the darkness is about to end (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Shemos 5645).

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes compares "I am Hashem" (Anochi) to another Divine statement: Hashem said "Let there be light" at Creation, and the power of that statement continues to produce light. The same is true of "I am Hashem" (Anochi). The revelation of Sinai therefore did not only give Jews information about Hashem. It placed a permanent Divine life-force (chiyus), an inner spiritual life, within every Jew. He explains that a tzaddik is not transformed into an entirely different creature. Rather, the hidden inner life-force (penimiyus ha-chiyus) already inside him becomes revealed. Emunah includes believing in this Divine life that Hashem placed within the Jewish soul and continually trying to reconnect with its spiritual root (shoresh) (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5633).

• The individual mitzvos tell a Jew what to do, but before he can serve Hashem properly he must first know Whom he is serving. The Sfas Emes therefore explains that "I am Hashem" (Anochi) represents accepting the yoke of Heaven's sovereignty (kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim), while the individual mitzvos are the actions that follow from that acceptance. This is the deeper order of the Shema as well: first "Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One" (Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad), and afterward the Torah proceeds to love

(ahavah) and the practical mitzvos. A mitzvah performed without awareness of the One who commands it is missing its deepest source. "I am Hashem" (Anochi) comes first because the whole system of Torah depends upon a Jew first placing himself under the rule of Hashem (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Yisro 5635).

• In one unusually systematic passage the Sfas Emes traces the three dimensions of the Divine Name Havayah—was (hayah), is (hoveh), and will be (yihyeh). The first is hayah: Hashem created everything. Since we did not witness Creation, this begins as spiritual listening (shemi'ah) and emunah. The second is present existence (hoveh): Hashem is not only the original Creator; His divine life-force (chiyus) sustains and directs the world now. This level can become increasingly visible to someone who learns to see Divine providence (hashgachah) within life. The third is will always be (yihyeh): history is traveling toward the final revelation of "Hashem is One and His Name is One" (Hashem Echad u-Shemo Echad), when the truth that is now hidden will become clear. Emunah therefore connects the origin of Creation, every present moment, and the final destiny of the world into one story (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5649).

• When the Torah says "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad), the Sfas Emes explains that Oneness (echad) means more than the numerical statement that there is one Hashem. He writes: Whatever exists receives its very existence and divine life-force (chiyus) from Hashem. The physical world appears to consist of millions of separate beings, forces, desires, and events. Emunah teaches the person to look beneath that multiplicity and recognize one Source of life. The hammer seems to strike, the doctor seems to heal, the employer seems to provide, and the human being seems to act independently. The forms are many; the ultimate divine life-force (chiyus) is one. Emunah therefore changes the way a Jew understands reality itself (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

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RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Are we supposed to have blind faith in Hashem?
- Discuss all of the evidence that there is a God.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It happened that King Ptolemy of Egypt gathered seventy-two Elders of Israel and placed them in seventy-two separate houses without revealing to them why he had summoned them. He then entered the room of each Elder separately and commanded: 'Write out for me the translation of the Torah of Moshe your teacher!' The Holy One, blessed be He, placed wisdom into the heart of every single one of them so that all seventy-two minds independently agreed upon the exact same protective clarifications—such as translating the opening verse as 'God created in the beginning' (so that no Greek reader would misread Bereishis as the name of a first deity creating a second deity), and rendering 'let Us make man' in the singular so no one would claim multiple powers created the world, and translating arnevet as 'the short-legged creature' because Ptolemy's wife was named Arnevet, lest the king claim the Jews were mocking him! Right after this, the Midrash

relates that Rabbi Yishmael asked Rabbi Akiva: 'Since you served as a disciple of Nachum Ish Gam Zu for twenty-two years —who expounded every single particle et in the Torah as coming to include something additional—how do you explain the word et in Bereishis bara Elohim et ha-shamayim ve-et ha-aretz?' Rabbi Akiva answered: 'Had the verse omitted the word et, someone might have imagined that heaven and earth were themselves deities partnering with God! Moreover, as you yourself taught on the verse For it is not an empty thing from you (Devarim 32:47)—if any word in the Torah appears empty, it is only from us because we have not yet labored enough to understand it! Rather, et ha-shamayim includes the sun, moon, stars, and constellations, and ve-et ha-aretz includes trees, grasses, and the Garden of Eden.'

Yalkut Shimoni on Bereishis, Remez 3 (cf. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 9a & Chagigah 12a)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Yechezkel Levenstein's lifelong quest to attain simple, straightforward faith was evident in the fact that he dwelt on that topic in virtually every talk he delivered over the years. He would customarily speak about the very simplest aspects of faith, returning to them time after time. He would repeatedly review the Torah's accounts of the events that form the foundations of faith: Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Splitting of the Sea and the Revelation at Har Sinai, recounting and reliving them countless times. Rav Shlomo Wolbe related, that he once traveled to visit Rav Chatzkel to ask him what he should emphasize with his students. He arrived on a visit after a long and tiring journey on public transportation, climbed the stairs to the mashgiach's room, which was in the ezras nashim and before he had a chance to rest his exertion, Rav Yechezkel said to him, "Go, Reb Shlomo, tell the bachurim that the world has a Creator. Have a good trip!" bringing the visit to a swift conclusion. "Were we previously unaware that the world has a Creator?!" Rav Wolbe continued by asking. "In recent years, I have come to understand that the answer is that we indeed did not know! We can pray three times a day, say 'Baruch Hashem,' 'Im yirtzeh Hashem,' and so forth, all day long but still remain ignorant of the existence of the world's Creator. His simple words were loaded with tangible faith and with a genuine awareness that it is indeed so — the world has a Creator; this should not be some superficial feeling but a profound awareness suffusing every corner of a person's being. "And when our teacher uttered these simple words, 'The world has a Creator,' they had a different ring for anyone interested in discerning it.

In Their Shadow, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ An irreligious Jew was once standing near the Klausenberger Rebbe and overheard him explaining the verse from Tehillim, "Sing to God a new song for He has performed amazing feats. His right hand and holy arm have helped Him." The Rebbe translated the verse into Yiddish and then gave an explanation. "I did not understand what he was saying," recalled the man, "but the verse enraged me. Where were God's amazing feats? Where was His outstretched arm? Many years and life experiences later, however, I recalled the explanation that the Klausenberger Rebbe had given and the idea entered my mind, Wasn't that in and of itself an amazing feat? In the hell of Auschwitz there was a Jew who was still faithful to the Almighty and took strength in the amazing feats that He had promised to perform in the future. This thought caused me, late in my life, to begin to return to our faith.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press

❖ Reb Yechezkel Levenstein once related that for a time he found it difficult to say the Modeh Ani prayer. "Why should I thank the Almighty for 'restoring my soul within me' for another torturous day? What kindness is there in mercifully restoring my soul if I cannot worship you properly? Until I finally realized that 'rabba emunasecha' — Thy faithfulness is great! I thank You for providing me with an additional day of faith — it is worth enduring all these tortures as long as I can continue living and having faith in God for an extra moment."

Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

❖ Reb Mendel Kaplan would say, "A baby accepts as real only those things it can put in its mouth. (That's why little babies are always putting everything they can get hold of into their mouths.) When the child gets a little older, it's enough to hold an object in his hand for him to know that it's real. When he grows still older, he realizes that he doesn't have to touch something to know it exists; if he can see it, it's also real. "But there's an even higher level. Reality is not limited to what can be perceived by the five senses.

Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO THINK ABOUT HASHEM ALL THE TIME

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-10, 35-12

As it says "to him you shall cling" (Devarim 10:20, Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive commandment to cleave unto Hashem, blessed be He, as Scripture commands: 'And to Him you shall cleave' (Devarim 10:20). This denotes an overwhelming love wherein a person does not separate his consciousness from Hashem for even a single moment. Scripture explicitly distinguishes between love and cleaving (deveikus) as two distinct spiritual stages, stating: 'To love Hashem your God, to obey His voice, and to cleave unto Him' (Devarim 30:20). The author of Chovos HaLevavos (Duties of the Heart) explains that cleaving represents complete, consummate devotion of the heart, as Scripture observes: 'There is a companion who cleaves closer than a brother' (Mishlei 18:24). The Ramban writes in his commentary (Devarim 11:22): '"And to Him you shall cleave" means that you shall remember Hashem, blessed be He, and His love constantly, so that your thoughts never separate from Him — when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you rise. The result is that when speaking with other people, your mouth and tongue engage them, but your heart remains standing before Hashem.' The Ramban adds that this supreme level is attainable by people of great spiritual stature whose souls, even during their earthly lifetimes, are bound in the bundle of life (tzror ha-chayim), because their very beings serve as a living sanctuary for the Divine Presence (Shechinah).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ "And Hashem said to Avram: Go forth from your land..." (Bereishis 12:1). Rabbi Yitzchak opened his discourse with the verse: "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear; and forget your people and your father's house" (Tehillim 45:11). Rabbi Yitzchak said: This may be compared to a traveler who was walking from place to place when he saw a grand palace radiant with lamps and order (or, as other commentators explain, a palace ablaze with flames while no one stepped forward to quench the fire). Stopping in his tracks, the traveler called out: "Could you possibly say that such a grand palace has no master to govern and care for it?!" Immediately, the Master of the palace looked out the window at him and said to him: "I am the Master of the palace!" So too, because our father Avraham looked at the cosmos (and saw a world full of order, yet burning with idolatry and lawlessness) and asked in his heart, "Could you possibly say that this universe has no Master to govern it?!", the Holy One, blessed be He, looked out from Heaven at him and said to him: "I am the Master of the universe!" "And the King will desire your beauty, for He is your Master" (Tehillim 45:12) — the King desires to beautify you in the world; "and bow down to Him" — therefore, "Hashem said to Avram: Go forth from your land."

Midrash Rabbah — Bereishis Rabbah 39:1

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The power of inspiring a fellow Jew to become more connected to Hashem and to His Torah is not the exclusive talent and ability unique to Kiruv professionals. When any sincere Jew lives their life in the way Hashem expects them, they will inspire those around them. I would like to thank Eugene and Marina Vurgaftman for allowing me to share their story with the TableTalk readers. In 2004, when Eugene and Marina Vurgaftman decided it was time to move from Owings Mills to Pikesville they engaged Dora to list their home. The market was slow and Dora was interested in getting people to see their home. They were approaching Memorial Day weekend so Dora mentioned that she would like to post their house on Saturday. Eugene and Marina were relatively new to shmiras Shabbos but they knew that it would not be appropriate to sell their property on Shabbos. They told Dora not to post their house till after Shabbos. When she asked them what the problem was they explained to her that since Shabbos was the day upon which Hashem does not want us to do work, her efforts would certainly not bear fruit. She accepted their request and waited to post the house until Sunday. Remarkably, within that week they landed a contract, in spite of the slow market. Several years later Eugene met Dora and asked how she was doing. She told him that she no longer works on Shabbos. She explained that since that discussion about posting the house on Shabbos, she started checking the work she did on Shabbos to see if, in fact, those efforts bore no fruit. She noticed how accurate that assessment was. Nothing she did on Shabbos panned out. She decided that there must be something to this and began observing Shabbos which led to other mitzvos as well. When I expressed my wonderment to Eugene he told me, "Rabbi Paysach, this is nothing extraordinary. Hashem always sends messages to everybody. Some people open up the message and others ignore it."

Table Talk, Edition 224 (Parshas Vayakhel Pekudei), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ All of Reb Dovid Feinstein's psakim took into account the psyche of the person he was answering. A young couple wanted to know if they should name their baby for a relative who had endured a difficult life and much suffering. Reb Dovid told them not to give that name. After the conversation was over, a talmid turned to Reb Dovid in surprise. "That is an issue? The Rosh Yeshivah usually says the other way, that it is okay to give the name." "It's true," Reb Dovid said, "that I don't think it's a problem, but they do, so they wanted me to say 'no.' If they would give the name that they find questionable, then every time the child has a fever or a rough day in school, they will say, 'You see, it's because of the name!'"

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ When Rav Shlomo Rothenberg was notified of the shocking news that a shul in nearby Monticello had been terribly damaged and desecrated with spray-painted swastikas and other anti-Semitic slurs by three teenaged hoodlums, he jumped right into action. He said to the officials involved in the case, "Will giving these teens jail time help to improve the situation? They'll most probably leave prison worse off than when they arrive there. I have a better idea. A friend of mine, Mr. Leibel Zissman, is a Holocaust survivor. I'll ask him to come down here and talk to the three guys about his experiences during the war. Maybe that will get them to understand a bit just how offensive their actions were. If we educate them to the best of our ability, then we know we did something purposeful." Mr. Zissman was happy to come down to the public school, where he addressed the hoodlums and their parents with a talk about his war experiences. The idea worked like a charm; the boys learned a never-to-be-forgotten lesson, and they all solemnly promised to never do such things again.

From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

B. TO NEVER FORGET HASHEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-6

As it says, "Guard yourself lest you forget God your Lord" (Devarim 8:11, Parshas Eikev)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ How should this mitzvah affect one's behavior?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture warns: 'Guard yourself lest you forget Hashem your God' (Devarim 8:11). Our Sages taught that wherever the Torah employs the terms 'guard' (hishamer), 'lest' (pen), or 'do not' (al), it constitutes a negative prohibition (lav); thus, this verse contains a dual biblical prohibition. Through this admonition, we are commanded never to allow the remembrance of Hashem, blessed be He, to slip from our minds for even a single moment. From this continuous mindfulness, one is obligated to cultivate the holy character traits that flow from Divine awe: deep reverence, profound modesty (tznius), purity of thought, and the refinement of all personal traits (middos), as Scripture states: 'In Hashem shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory' (Yeshayahu 45:25).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Tanchuma told a story to illuminate the verse, 'For what great nation is there that has a God so close to it as Hashem our God, whenever we call upon Him?' (Devarim 4:7): There was once a ship filled entirely with gentile merchants, with a single Jewish passenger aboard. When the ship docked at a distant island port, the merchants handed money to the Jew and said: 'Take this money, go ashore onto this island, and buy provisions for us.' The Jew replied: 'Am I not a stranger here? Do I know anyone on this island to whom I can go?' Later, when the ship docked at another port, they watched the Jew step confidently ashore, and asked him: 'Do you have relatives or patrons in this port?' He answered them: 'Wherever I walk, my Patron (the Holy One, Blessed be He) walks with me — for our God is not locked inside a wooden temple on one island; wherever a Jew stands and whispers a prayer, Hashem is right there beside him!'

Devarim Rabbah 2:16

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ On November 10, 1938, the day after the infamous Kristalnacht riots all throughout Germany, a group of truncheon-wielding Gestapo agents burst into the home of Rabbi Michel Munk zt"l, Rav of the K'hal Adas Yisroel Synagogue in Berlin and dragged him outside. Together with other communal leaders in Berlin, they were summoned to the ruins of the once magnificent synagogue, which had been set aflame and burnt to the ground. What Rav Munk and the others saw was utter devastation. The Aron Hakodesh was incinerated, there were gaping holes in the walls, and the entire electrical system of the synagogue was destroyed by the fire. Suddenly, they saw a glow at one end of the destruction. It was the Ner Tamid, with its own battery, which had escaped the looting, to cast a glow over the synagogue. The Nazi was amazed and asked Rav Munk what that light was. He replied, "This is our Ner Tamid - our Eternal Light". The German looked at him with hatred in his eyes. "You cursed Jews, Ihr Juden seit ein unverustliches volk - You Jews are indestructible people!

Table Talk, Edition 269 (Parshas Yisro), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

C. TO ACT AS IF HASHEM IS ALWAYS BEFORE YOU

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-35

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should speak pleasantly, gently, and calmly to every individual, conducting himself as one who stands in the direct presence of the King of kings, in awe and restraint, fearful of raising his voice because the entire earth is filled with His glory (Yeshayahu 6:3). For this reason, a person is likewise forbidden to walk with an arrogant posture (b'komas zekufah) or with an uncovered head (gilui rosh), ensuring that the consciousness of Divine majesty constantly rests upon him.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ On King David's prayer, 'My God, in You I have trusted, let me not be put to shame' (Tehillim 25:2), the Midrash tells a story: Once the night watchmen of a city were patrolling the streets and seized a poor traveler. To save himself from being beaten, the traveler cried out: 'Do not strike me — for I am a member of the King's own household!' Hearing the King's name, the guards held off and brought him before the King in the morning, saying: 'Last night we found this man claiming to be a member of your royal household!' The King looked at the stranger and asked: 'My son, do you know me personally?' 'No, my lord,' whispered the traveler. 'Then how can you claim to be a member of my household?' The traveler pleaded: 'Please, my lord King! I was terrified of the guards in the dark, and I placed my trust in your great and merciful name so they would not beat me — please do not put my trust in you to shame!' Moved with compassion, the King turned to his officers and declared: 'Because this man placed his trust in my name, release him in peace and give him gifts!' If a mortal king of flesh and blood honors a stranger merely for trusting in his name, how much more so will the King of Kings never put to shame a person who cries out: 'My God, in You I have trusted!'

Midrash Tehillim (Shocher Tov) 25:4

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Shaya Epstein was Rav Chaim Kanievsky's driver. "On many of our trips," Rabbi Shaya Epstein recounted, "Rav Chaim Kanievsky would converse with me in his usual friendly, unassuming manner. In the thirty-two years I had the honor of driving him, he shared a few personal stories. "Once he recounted his experience as a young man when he had to go to the enlistment office to request a deferment from army service. "The first time I went there," he said, "I sat in the waiting area with a Gemara. I got completely engrossed in learning, and before I realized what was happening, they had closed for the day and inadvertently locked me into the building. I had to climb out through a window because the door was double-locked. Although it was only a few blocks from the Lomza Yeshivah, I had no idea how to get back. A kind passerby helped me find my way. "'If I fill up part of my brain with the names of streets, it would be at the expense of a bit of Torah!' "He added, 'From my youngest years, I always davened that nothing but Torah should go into my head!'" Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman described a related incident. After the founding of the State, all bachurim were required to appear before the Lishkat HaGiyus (Conscription Office). Bachurim who were fit to serve in the army were allowed an annual deferment to continue their Torah studies, based on the agreement worked out between the Chazon Ish and Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. Those deemed unfit for service were given a permanent deferment. It was Rav Chaim's turn to be interviewed. "Which yeshivah do you attend?" asked the screener. "Lomza Yeshivah in Petach Tikva," Rav Chaim replied. "On which street is this yeshivah located?" Rav Chaim replied that he wasn't sure of the address or the name of the street. "Which intersection is it near?" He replied that he wasn't sure about any of the street names. "But I know how to get there from Bnei Brak by public transportation." The screener pressed Rav Chaim several times, insisting that since he had been studying in the yeshivah for several years, he had to know the name of the street it was on! Rav Chaim repeatedly replied that he had no idea. After several more similar questions and answers, Rav Chaim was issued a permanent deferment; they did not feel such an absent-minded young man would be an asset to the army. Rabbi Aharon Leib pointed

out that the army screeners were accustomed to bachurim concocting a variety of stories to exempt themselves. Therefore, the army trained professionals to ascertain if the interviewee was being truthful. But they probably never encountered answers as confounding as those sincerely given by Rav Chaim Kanievsky!

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

D. TO NEVER FORGET ABOUT THE FACT OF THE REVELATION

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-8

As it says, "Guard yourself, and guard your soul very much, so that you do not forget the things that your eyes have seen, and so that you do not turn away... Don't forget the day that you stood before Hashem your G-d at Chorev" (Devarim 4:9, Parshas Va'eschanan)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a biblical prohibition to forget the awesome Divine revelation at Har Sinai, where Hashem gave us the Torah; rather, our eyes and hearts must remain anchored to that encounter all the days of our lives. Scripture explicitly commands: 'Only take heed to yourself, and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life... the day that you stood before Hashem your God at Chorev' (Devarim 4:9–10).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss how this mitzvah is the basis of our belief in Hashem and the Torah, because it was a revelation to millions of witnesses, and how this is a testimony that cannot be fabricated.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended on high to receive the Torah, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting and tying decorative crowns onto the tops of the letters of the Torah. Moshe asked before Him: 'Master of the Universe, who is holding You back—why add crowns on top of the letters?' God answered him: 'There is a man who is destined to arise at the end of many generations, and Akiva ben Yosef is his name, who will expound upon every single crown and point mounds and mounds of halachos!' Moshe pleaded: 'Master of the Universe, show him to me!' God said to him: 'Turn around behind you!' Moshe went and sat down at the back of the eighth row in Rabbi Akiva's study hall. Listening to the intricate legal debate between Rabbi Akiva and his students, Moshe did not recognize the new formulations they were discussing, and his spirit grew faint—until the students reached a certain topic and asked Rabbi Akiva: 'Master, from where do you know this law?' And Rabbi Akiva answered them: 'It is a Halachah given to Moshe from Sinai!' Immediately Moshe's mind was set at ease!

Talmud Bavli, Menachos 29b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Our Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, related a humorous parable to bring home a very important point. There was once a Chassidic Rebbi who had two sons. After the Rebbi's death, the sons argued over who would now lead the dynasty. One morning, the younger son went to his brother and his followers, claiming that the Rebbi had appeared to him

in a dream the night before. "Our father told me to inform you that I should be the new Rebbi. " "If the Rebbi had wanted me to accept this decision," replied his brother, "he would have come to me in a dream and not to you!"

I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 326

❖ The following story was written up by Mark Twain in his essay on the Jews that was printed in Harper's Magazine in March 1898. It is a magnificent illustration of Rav Hirsch's reading of 26:17-18 (see the earlier section on the Parshah). The German dictionary seems to make no distinction between a stranger and a foreigner; in its view a stranger is a foreigner - a sound position, I think. You will always be, by ways and habits and predilections, substantially strangers - foreigners - wherever you are, and that will probably keep the race prejudice against you alive. But you were the favorites of Heaven originally, and your manifold and unfair prosperities convince me that you have crowded back into that snug place again. Here is an incident that is significant. Last week in Vienna a hailstorm struck the prodigious Central Cemetery and made wasteful destruction there. In the Christian part of it, according to the official figures, 621 window-panes were broken; more than 900 singing-birds were killed; five great trees and many small ones were torn to shreds and the shreds scattered far and wide by the wind; the ornamental plants and other decorations of the graves were ruined, and more than a hundred tomb-lanterns shattered; and it took the cemetery's whole force of 300 laborers more than three days to clear away the storm's wreckage. In the report occurs this remark - and in its italics you can hear it grit its Christian teeth "... lediglich die israelitische Abtheilung des Friedhofes vom Hagelwetter ganzlich verschont worden war." "Not a hailstone hit the Jewish reservation! Such nepotism makes me tired."

Table Talk, Edition 303 (Parshas Ki Savo), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

2. To Know That Hashem Is One

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 2

As the Torah says Hear, O Israel. Hashem our God, Hashem is one (Devarim 6:4, Parshas Va'eschanan)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If one believes that god has a physical body, is that a violation of this mitzvah?
- what if he believes that Hashem has multiple parts?
- Can G-d die?
- Can Hashem get bored or tired?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This is a fundamental pillar of our faith: following the primary knowledge that Hashem exists as the First Cause of all reality,

it is necessary to believe with complete, unyielding faith that He is singularly and utterly One, embodying an absolute and indivisible unity that has no parallel;

He is not a physical body, nor does He possess any corporeal form;

no physical attributes, dimensions, or corporeal concepts can possibly apply to Him;

nothing that can affect a physical entity — such as composition, division, movement, or change — can ever affect Him;

There is no second power comparable to Him, and beside Him there is no other deity whatsoever.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we say that Hashem is one, we mean that Hashem is the only power that created all that exists in the universe, He is the only power that is responsible for all that occurs in the universe, and finally that Hashem is single minded that all that exists and occurs is in order to us to be able to have the pleasure of coming close to Him.

This mitzvah reminds us that Hashem is the creator of the world, and that Hashem is responsible for all that happens in the world, both the good and the bad. Knowing that Hashem is managing the world inspires us to come close to Him in many ways. Firstly it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, because Hashem runs the world, we realize that we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Also because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

Finally, the mitzvah of knowing that Hashem is one reminds us that because everything was created to be used to come close to Hashem, we should use all that we have, our entire life and our resources to perfect ourselves to that we can come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

BAAL HATURIM

The oneness of Hashem means that even though He may appear as a strict judge at some times, and as a compassionate father at other times, it is all the same loving Hashem.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Hashem being one means that there is one power Who created all that exists, who is responsible for all that happens, and all that exists and that Hashem is single minded so all exists and happens for one purpose: for us to be able to come close to him.

SFAS EMES

• A Midrash says that everything Hashem created appears in pairs: heaven and earth, Olam Hazeh and Olam Haba, man and woman. The Sfas Emes explains that this reveals a fundamental difference between the Creator and the creation. No creature is complete in itself. Heaven requires earth, this world requires the next world, and human beings require one another. Every created thing is dependent on something beyond itself. Only Hashem possesses absolute completeness (sheleimus) in Himself. Thus “Hashem is One” (Hashem Echad) also teaches that

Hashem alone needs no counterpart, partner, or completion. This is why true divine unity (achdus) belongs essentially to Him, while Klal Yisrael can only receive a share in Divine unity (cheilek be-achdus) by attaching themselves to Him (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5654).

• Before the sin of Adam HaRishon, the Sfas Emes describes Creation as more directly attached to its spiritual root (shoresh). Sin introduced separation, concealment, and a world in which things could appear detached from their Source. This is the background to the Midrash calling Avraham the one who "stitched together the rent fabric" of the world. The Sfas Emes explains that Avraham's avodah restored the connection between the torn parts of creation and their Divine root. This is also why Scripture calls Avraham "one" ("One was Avraham," Yechezkel 33:24): Oneness (echad) is higher than merely being first in time, because he united creation back to the One Creator. The mitzvah of the unification of Hashem (yichud Hashem) continues this Avrahamic avodah — refusing to allow the fragmented appearance of Creation to become spiritual separation from its Source (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5642).

• Normally, something cannot be both completely beyond us and completely close to us. The Sfas Emes explains that with Hashem both are true. He writes: This is "the essence of faith" (ikar ha-emunah): Hashem is beyond every created category, and therefore no mind or world can contain Him. Yet precisely because every creature receives its existence from Him, no one can be closer. This guards against two opposite errors. A person must not imagine Hashem as simply another spiritual force located somewhere inside the universe. But neither may he imagine that Hashem is so distant that the world runs independently. The unification of Hashem (yichud Hashem) joins these two truths: He transcends everything, and His divine life-force (chiyus) is present within everything (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayigash 5656).

• Nature can easily appear to possess an independent system. The Sfas Emes teaches that this is precisely the illusion that unification of Hashem (yichud Hashem) corrects. He says that Klal Yisrael's special testimony is that nature itself comes from Hashem. He again connects this to "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad), "Who continually brings all existence into being." An open miracle therefore does not mean that Hashem suddenly appears where previously nature had been independent. The miracle removes the covering and reveals the Divine governance (hanhagah) that was sustaining nature all along. This is why Yetzias Mitzrayim was so important for emunah: when Hashem openly changed nature, Klal Yisrael learned how to understand nature afterward (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5648).

• Even Torah itself appears divided below. Yet the Sfas Emes expresses the relationship through the verse "For a mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is light" (Mishlei 6:23): the light of Torah (or Torah) is the undivided source, while each mitzvah (ner mitzvah) is a particular lamp through which that one light enters the physical world. He compares this to the human soul: one soul gives life to many different limbs, and each limb performs a different action, yet all receive life from the same higher soul (neshamah). They are not hundreds of disconnected religious obligations. Each is one branch of a single Torah, one will of Hashem (ratzon Hashem), and one spiritual light (or) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5658).

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes gives an exceptionally strong explanation of the words "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad): It is not sufficient to believe that there is one Hashem ruling over a world that otherwise exists independently. Every created thing exists only because Hashem continually gives it divine life-force (chiyus). The object appears

separate because the Divine life within it is hidden, but it has no independent source of existence. A human being may feel, "I am here, and Hashem is somewhere above me." The deeper truth of divine unity (achdus) is that the person's own ability to exist, move, think, and feel is itself received from Hashem. The axe acts, but its spiritual power (koach) is not independent of the one wielding it. So too, created beings act, yet all their divine life-force (chiyus) comes from the Creator (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

• The Sfas Emes asks how the Torah can command love. Love seems to be an emotion that either exists or does not. His answer is that true love for Hashem (ahavas Hashem) is already planted within the higher soul (neshamah). Every created being, at its deepest level, is naturally drawn toward the Source of its life. What hides this love (ahavah) are the many secondary loves created through natural order (teva). When a Jew accepts "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad), he is not manufacturing an unnatural emotion. This explains the Torah's sequence: "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad). First recognize the One beneath everything; then the heart can rediscover its own natural attraction toward Him (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5653).

• Appreciate the warmth of this message: the Sfas Emes pays careful attention to the Torah's wording. It does not say merely that there is the One God (Elokei Echad); it says "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad). The Name points to Hashem as the One who continually gives existence to everything that exists. Creation is therefore not only an event that happened thousands of years ago. If Hashem had created the universe and then allowed it to continue by its own independent power, divine unity (achdus) would still be hidden behind secondary causes. Thus the mitzvah of the unification of Hashem (yichud Hashem) trains a Jew not only to ask, "Who made this?" but also, "What is giving this existence now" (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5648).

• The pasuk describing the future says: "On that day Hashem shall be One and His Name One." Is Hashem not One today? The Sfas Emes explains that He is already One, but in Olam Hazeh that unity is concealed. Galus creates the appearance of many competing powers, conflicting events, good and evil, success and suffering. Therefore divine unity (achdus) is presently the secret of the One. In Vayechi he links the hidden appointed end (keitz) with the secret of Divine unity and explains that the mitzvah therefore asks a Jew to believe today what the completed history of the world will one day reveal openly. It is a foretaste of the World to Come (me'ein Olam HaBa), a time when the scattered activity of the week returns to its root and Klal Yisrael receives a special share in Divine unity (cheilek be-achdus) (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayechi 5634).

• Human experience often divides Providence into two categories. When something pleasant occurs, we see Hashem's chesed. The Sfas Emes teaches that unification of Hashem (yichud Hashem) requires recognizing the One beneath both. He explains the words "Hashem our God, Hashem is One" to mean that even the attribute of strict justice (middas ha-din, Elo-keinu) is an expression of Divine mercy and closeness (Hashem). He compares suffering to the pain that precedes childbirth; the distress (tzarah) itself can prepare a new birth. Elsewhere he explains the Gemara's teaching that today we say "Who is good and does good" (HaTov ve-HaMeitiv) on good news and "the True Judge" (Dayan HaEmes) on painful news, while in the future everything will be recognized as "Who is good and does good" (HaTov ve-HaMeitiv). The events are already coming from One; what is lacking now is our ability to see their unity (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5657).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the ramifications of Hashem being one. And why that means that Hashem has a single focus (single minded), and that all that is created is for the single purpose of us coming close to Him

- Discuss how this means that all that happens in history and in our personal lives, both the good and the bad comes from Hashem

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once Rabbi Reuven spent Shabbos in Tiberias, and a philosopher met him and asked: 'Who is the most odious person in the world?' Rabbi Reuven answered: 'The one who denies the Creator who formed him!' The philosopher asked: 'How so?' Rabbi Reuven said to him: 'Honor your father and your mother; do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness against your neighbor; do not covet—a person never denies any of these moral obligations until he first denies the Fundamental Root (the Creator), and a person never steps forward to commit a transgression unless he first denies the One who commanded against it!'

Tosefta, Shevuos 3:5

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Zevy Galombeck shared the following beautiful story. Rav Chaim Volozhin, in Nefesh HaChaim, writes that if a person would constantly review and truly believe the concept of Ein Od Milvado, that there is only one source and force of energy, and that is the Ribono Shel Olam, they would be able to nullify any opposing force that comes their way. When Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky was a young girl, she lived near the border of Yerushalayim, close to where the Arabs were. She once went to her Zaideh, Rav Aryeh Levin, and said, "I live so close to where the Arabs are, and there are so many snipers." Tragically, she had even lost a sibling, rachmana litzlan, to one of those snipers. She asked, "Zaideh, how can I live here? It's so dangerous." Her Zaideh told her, "Whenever you see a sniper, say Ein Od Milvado." One day, she walked out of her house and saw a sniper aiming directly at her. A shot was fired. She said the words Ein Od Milvado, and she saw the bullet veer off in a different direction. This didn't happen just once, it happened again, and then a third time. Each time, bullets came straight toward her, and each time she said Ein Od Milvado, they changed direction.

Table Talk, Edition 446 (Parshas Shelach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

3. Not to Entertain the Thought of Other Powers

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 8

As the Torah says, You shall have no other gods before Me (Shemos 20:3, Parshas Yisro)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to believe that another force runs the universe aside from Hashem?
- Is one allowed to say that they believe in the trinity?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Whoever entertains a thought in his mind (Heaven forbid)

that there exists any deity other than Hashem,

or conceives of any partner, intermediary, or co-power alongside Him (Heaven forbid);

or even contemplates that there is any genuine reality or substance to idol worship (Heaven forbid)—

such an individual denies the foundational principle of the Torah (kofer b'ikkar).

A person must never utter any statement that connotes heresy (epikorsus) or implies the slightest acknowledgment of idolatry.

For whoever validates or acknowledges idolatry is considered as if he has denied the entire Torah, because he repudiates its very cornerstone.

We are halachically bound to surrender our lives and all our resources (mesiras nefesh) over this prohibition; regarding anything that touches upon the fundamental bedrock of faith, the rule is to forfeit one's life rather than transgress (yehareig v'al ya'avor).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

When we say that Hashem is one, we mean that Hashem is the only power that created all that exists in the universe, He is the only power that is responsible for all that occurs in the universe, and finally that Hashem is single minded that all that exists and occurs is in order to us to be able to have the pleasure of coming close to Him.

This mitzvah reminds us that Hashem is the creator of the world, and that Hashem is responsible for all that happens in the world, both the good and the bad. Knowing that Hashem is managing the world inspires us to come close to Him in many ways. Firstly it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, because Hashem runs the world, we realize that we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Also because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

Finally, the mitzvah of knowing that Hashem is one reminds us that because everything was created to be used to come close to Hashem, we should use all that we have, our entire life and our resources to perfect ourselves to that we can come close to Hashem.

A. TO REFLECT HASHEM'S UNITY WITH UNITY IN YOUR LIFE, EVERY SINGLE THING YOU DO SHOULD BE TO SERVE HASHEM

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-10

SEFER CHAREIDIM

All of a person's actions should be directed solely for the sake of Heaven (l'shem Shamayim), extending beyond the performance of formal commandments, as Scripture instructs: 'In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths' (Mishlei 3:6). Whether eating, drinking, sleeping, engaging in marital intimacy, conducting business, speaking, or maintaining silence — in all of these physical activities, one should hold the clear intention to sustain the body and mind in health and purity to serve Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Hashem being one means that there is one power who created all that exist, who is responsible for all that happens, and that Hashem is single minded so all exists and happens for one purpose for us to be able to come close to him. Therefore we are to reflect the oneness of the world, that everything is to be used to serve Hashem, with oneness in our own life and use all that we have to serve Hashem.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Antoninus the Emperor said to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Rebbi): 'In the future judgment, the human body and the human soul can both excuse themselves from accountability! How so? The body will say: The soul is the one that sinned — for from the day it departed from me, I have been lying silent in the grave like a stone! And the soul will say: The body is the one that sinned — for from the day I departed from it, I have been flying through the air like a pure bird without touching a thing!' Rebbi answered him: 'I will tell you a parable of what this resembles. A human king had a magnificent orchard containing delicious early figs (bikkuros), and he appointed two watchmen over it — one who was lame and could not walk, and one who was blind and could not see. One day the lame watchman said to the blind watchman: I see delicious early figs high on the trees! Come, let me climb onto your shoulders so that with your legs and my eyes we can pick them and eat them! So the lame man rode on the blind man's back, and together they picked the figs and ate them. A few days later, the king came to inspect his orchard and cried out: Where are my delicious early figs? The lame man protested: Master, do I have legs to walk over to them? And the blind man protested: Master, do I have eyes to see them? What did the wise king do? He placed the lame man back onto the shoulders of the blind man and judged the two of them together as one! So too, in the World to Come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings the soul, places it back inside the body, and judges them together!'

Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 91a–91b (181:17–182:1)

4. Not to Inquire into Heresy

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 156

As the Torah says, that you shall not follow after your heart and your own eyes (Bamidbar 15:39, Parshas Shelach).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it obligatory to believe that the Torah is divine?
- Is it obligatory to believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition dictates that we must not entertain within our hearts any philosophical speculation or doubt that could uproot any of the fundamental principles of our faith, lest the evil inclination lead us into heresy (Heaven forbid). As our Sages of blessed memory expounded on the verse, 'Do not follow after your own heart

> and after your own eyes' (Bamidbar 15:39): '"After your own heart" denotes heresy (minuth), while "after your own eyes" denotes immoral desire (zenus).'

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The 13 principles foundational principles of our faith can be seen as details of three basic principles. 1. That Hashem exists, created and controls the world. 2. Hashem has communicated his immutable will to us in the form of the Torah through Moshe 3. If we do mitzvos we will be rewarded and help to perfect the world, and if do aveiros, transgressions, we will be punished and help to destroy the world.

Together, these principles inspire us to be devoted to Hashem, and the Torah, which help to perfect our character and bring us close to Hashem.

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Teach all of Maimonides 13 Principles
- Reason for techias hameisim:

> **RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (1:3)**
>
> In the original state of the world, death was not necessary. Originally evil and good had an equal balance and man simply had to choose the good and overcome the evil to become the baal hashleimus and immediately get the pleasure of the reward in olam haba.
>
> The olam haba would take place by the neshamah purifying and "spiritualizing" the body to such a degree that even the body would get the pleasure of being close to Hashem.
>
> However, after he did the sin, Adam put chisaron (anti-G-dliness) into himself and into the entire world. It is now much harder to reach shleimus. He now has to overcome the chisaron in himself and in the world in order or return the world to the state of Adam Harishon before his sin, and after that to bring himself to the state of shleimus.
>
> Additionally, because he incorporated ra into his body and into the world, the body will have to die and the world will have to be destroyed and both will be rebuilt in a pure form before they can attach to Hashem

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ If heresy is so insidious, why does God allow it to flourish? R' Bunam of P'shis'cha, in his ironic style, explained it thus: If not for heresy, wealthy men would refuse to help support the poor. "There is a God in Heaven," they would declare. "He will take His unfortunate children." Therefore, God allows the wealthy to entertain the "heretical" thought that if they don't provide for the poor, nobody else will.

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

5. To Love Hashem

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 3

As the Torah says And you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Devarim 6:5, Parshas Va'eschanan).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the way to develop a love towards Hashem?
- How often to you have to love Hashem?
- Are we obligated to make other people love Hashem as well?
- Who first did this?
- How is this part of loving Hashem?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This is the pathway toward acquiring love for Him: when a person meditates upon His wondrous deeds and vast creations until he comprehends Hashem to the utmost limit of human capacity, the heart is ignited with an intense, burning love for Him. This deep attachment represents the essential love demanded of us; therefore, let a person dedicate his full intellect to cultivating love for Hashem. Man cannot truly love the Holy One, blessed is He, except through knowledge and comprehension, for love is directly commensurate with understanding: if the knowledge is meager, the love is meager, and if the knowledge is profound, the love is profound. Consequently, a person must devote himself to acquiring true wisdom and understanding that reveal the glory of his Maker, according to the intellectual capability with which he has been endowed.

This is among the constant commandments that a person is obligated to observe at every moment, and it applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

Included within this mitzvah is the obligation to draw humanity closer to Hashem's service and worship, blessed is He, and to make Him beloved to all people, just as Avraham Avinu did, as the Torah states: 'And the souls that they had made in Charan' (Bereishis 12:5). For this reason, the Holy One, blessed is He, called him His beloved friend, as Scripture proclaims: 'Avraham, My beloved'—

— as Scripture declares: 'The seed of Avraham, My beloved' (Yeshayahu 41:8).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

If we develop an intense love and reverence for Hashem, that will motivate and inspire us to fulfill His mitzvos and perfect our character, in order to come close to Him

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 418)

If we love Hashem that will motivate us to fulfill his mitzvos properly.

RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI

When we develop the feelings of love for Hashem, that is manifest in chesed and love for other people. When we train ourselves to love Hashem it is then easier for us to love and to chesed to other people.

CHOVOS HALEVAVOS — GATE OF LOVE OF HASHEM (CHAPTER 1)

Loving Hashem and being intimate with Hashem is a result and goal of all of the mitzvos and middos.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (HAKDAMA)

Love of Hashem means that one is aroused to give nachas to Hashem, just as one yearns to give nachas to a beloved parent. It also includes taking deep pleasure when others give nachas to Hashem, and feeling genuine sorrow whenever oneself or others cause Hashem grief.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 1)

Naturally, we have a spiritual magnet inside of us that draws us close to Hashem. This connection is the greatest source of simchah, as King David said: "Dovka nafshi acharecha" — "My soul thirsts and clings after You" (Tehillim 63:9). It is only the spiritual partitions (mechitzos) around us that prevent this magnet from connecting. The mitzvos serve to dismantle these mechitzos, while avoiding aveiros prevents new barriers from separating the magnet.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 19)

Chasidus comprises three essential dimensions: the action, the emotion, and the thought. The action consists of meticulous adherence to all the hiddurim of the mitzvah; the emotion consists of profound reverence (yirah), humility, love, and joyful yearning (dveikus); and the thought consists of dedicating the deed to increase the glory of Heaven and bestow merit upon all of Klal Yisrael.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes gives an unusual grammatical interpretation of "And you shall love" (ve-ahavta): it can function almost as a direct consequence (po'el yotzei), an action that causes love beyond the person himself. Citing the Zohar, he writes: one who loves the King causes lovingkindness (chesed) to flow to all. This was expressed through Avraham, whose love caused lovingkindness (chesed) to become revealed in the world. The Sfas Emes therefore explains “And you shall love” (ve-ahavta) as “to awaken supernal love Above.” When a Jew awakens true love below, he opens a channel for a corresponding revelation of Divine love above. Ahavas Hashem is therefore not confined to the private inner world of the individual. It affects the spiritual relationship between Heaven and earth and becomes a source through which lovingkindness (chesed) is revealed throughout Creation (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5656).

• If Ahavas Hashem is already present, why do so many people fail to feel it? The Sfas Emes answers that the love can be covered. He writes that love for Hashem is naturally implanted in the soul, but a person may attach himself to physical desires and divert that faculty of love toward superficial worldly objects. These desires do not

create a new soul; they hide the "true inner point" (ha-nekudah ha-amitis) already within it. Therefore the road to Ahavas Hashem is often a process of removal. Ahavas Hashem is like a spring beneath the earth. The water already exists; the work is to clear away the earth blocking its flow (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Nitzavim 5631).

• Immediately after "And you shall love" (ve-ahavta), the Torah commands: "And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart." The Sfas Emes follows the Sifrei's question: how does a person come to love Hashem? By placing His words upon his heart. Love requires knowledge. One cannot deeply love someone who remains entirely unknown. Torah reveals Hashem through His inner will (ratzon), His wisdom, His lovingkindness (chesed), His compassion (rachamim), and the ways by which He governs Creation. The Sfas Emes therefore calls Torah a "precious, coveted vessel" (kli chemdah): through it, a Jew learns to recognize the goodness of the Giver, and this recognition creates spiritual longing (teshukah). Properly learned, it is an encounter with the inner will (ratzon) of Hashem. The more the Torah makes the Creator real to the mind, the more the heart becomes capable of loving Him (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5634).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the Midrash's use of the words "with all your heart" in an extraordinarily demanding way. "And you shall love" (ve-ahavta) means that there should ultimately be no independent desire other than the desire for Hashem. This does not necessarily mean that a person literally ceases to want food, family, livelihood, or other legitimate things. It means that these inner desires (retzonos) no longer function as independent masters. They are gathered beneath one supreme inner will (ratzon): to live according to the will of the Creator (ratzon ha-Borei). Ahavas Hashem is therefore the inner counterpart of "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad): because reality has one Source, the human being is called upon to become inwardly one as well (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

• Human effort is indispensable, yet the Sfas Emes insists that the deepest love cannot be manufactured solely by human effort. Torah, mitzvos, yearning, and self-discipline prepare the spiritual vessel (kli), but the actual revelation of Ahavah is ultimately a gift. This helps explain the unique connection between Ahavah and Shabbos. Shabbos is called "a precious gift" (matanah tovah), and the Sfas Emes says that the weekdays are primarily associated with reverent awe (yirah) while Shabbos is associated with love (ahavah). Then Shabbos brings a revelation that cannot be generated in exactly the same way by ordinary weekday effort. This pattern becomes a model for Ahavas Hashem generally: man must do everything possible from below, but the final opening of the heart comes from Above (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5648).

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes notices the wording, "And you shall love Hashem your God." He explains the particle es expansively: if a person genuinely loves Hashem, then the things that bring him closer to Hashem naturally become precious to him. Torah, mitzvos, refined middos, holy people, holy times, and opportunities for avodah are no longer experienced merely as obligations. They are pathways toward the One whom the person desires. This is psychologically profound. People naturally cherish letters from someone they love, places associated with that person, and anything that brings them closer. The same should become true in avodas Hashem. The mitzvah of Ahavah changes how a Jew experiences the entire system of Torah: mitzvos become not only commands imposed upon him but doors through which he can approach Hashem (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5656).

• A person may hear the demand "with all your heart" (be-chol levavecha) and feel that such a level is far beyond him. He explains the Sifrei that one should continually place the words of Torah upon the heart, and that yearning draws out the spirit of holiness (ruach ha-kedushah) hidden within him. The Sfas Emes connects this with "I have toiled and I have found" (yaga'ti u-matzasi): one exerts effort, but the final discovery arrives almost like an unexpected windfall (metzi'ah), because what is discovered was deeper than what human effort alone could produce. Thus a person who does not yet feel Ahavas Hashem should not conclude that the mitzvah is inaccessible. The longing, the searching, and the refusal to be satisfied with spiritual distance are themselves the opening of the gates of the heart (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5634).

• The Sfas Emes asks: how can a physical human being come to love the Creator? He cites Sefer HaYashar: one of the roots of love is resemblance between the lover and the beloved. Hashem therefore sanctified us through the mitzvos, our actions and middos become aligned with His inner will (ratzon). The 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions refine the corresponding limbs and sinews of the human being. As the person becomes more shaped by Divine inner will (ratzon), a new possibility of cleaving to Hashem (dveikus) arises. Thus Ahavas Hashem is not an isolated feeling standing beside the rest of Judaism. The entire system of mitzvos is designed to refine the human being until love and attachment to Hashem become increasingly natural (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5658).

• The Sfas Emes concludes one discussion of "And you shall love" (ve-ahavta) with a remarkable expression of wonder: The Creator, infinitely beyond all worlds, asks a fragile human being to love Him. The Sfas Emes says that this itself is a wondrous kindness. Why is human love so precious? Man lives amid concealment. He is surrounded by physical desire, distraction, competing pleasures, and a world in which Hashem is not openly visible. Precisely from there Hashem desires that he turn away from worldly vanities (havlei olam) and choose cleaving to Hashem (dveikus). The Sfas Emes does not explicitly say that angels are incapable of love or that human love is "better" in every sense; rather, he emphasizes the wonder that Hashem seeks the love of man specifically while man is immersed in this low physical world. The mitzvah therefore gives enormous dignity to ordinary human struggle. Every time a Jew chooses Hashem from within concealment, he fulfills a Divine inner will (ratzon) that reaches far beyond what he can see (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5656).

• The Sfas Emes directly addresses the famous question: How can the Torah command a feeling? His answer is that the question itself teaches us something about the Jewish neshamah. At Har Sinai, when Hashem said "I am Hashem your God" (Anochi Hashem Elokecha), Divinity (Elokus) was engraved within the souls of Klal Yisrael. Therefore "And you shall love Hashem your God" means: love the God whom you already received and became attached to at Sinai. The love is not an emotion imposed from outside. It is part of the inner structure of the Jewish soul. A planted seed may be hidden beneath the ground, but its hidden nature already contains the tree. So too, even when a Jew does not consciously feel love of Hashem, the root of that love remains within him (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5647).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

▪ Discuss the various methods to develop Ahavas Hashem

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ On 5 Shevat 5652/January 1892, the Mother of Lithuanian yeshivos, the Volozhin Yeshivah, was closed. All its students returned to their hometowns dejected and disconsolate. The Russian winter was at its bitter crest. There were insufficient numbers of carriages and a large part of the student body was too poor to afford the few that were available. Thus, the majority set off for home on foot, at least part of the way. The Chofetz Chaim's son, Avrohom, a rarity of a scholar and a virtuous young man, was included in that group. The seemingly endless journey under those terrible conditions took their toll on his health and he contracted a serious lung disease. Upon arriving home he was immediately taken to specialists in Vilna who diagnosed his condition as pneumonia, but could not suggest any cure, for it was in the pre-antibiotics era. The only advice they offered was to allow the patient absolute relaxation in a pine forest. Father and son spent months on end in a rustic retreat, expounding on some of the most complex Talmudic themes. The situation then seemed to have improved sufficiently for them to return home to Radin. Some time later, the Chofetz Chaim traveled to Warsaw in connection with the publication of one of the volumes of Mishnah Berurah. Suddenly, unexpectedly, he received a telegram informing him that his son Avrohom had passed away. He immediately rushed to the railroad station and returned home. He missed the funeral procession, however, meeting the pallbearers on their return from the cemetery. The Chofetz Chaim was clearly shaken at not having had the opportunity to confer on his son his last honors. He did, however, pause to deliver a short but moving eulogy "During the bitter years of the terrible pogroms of 1648-49, the marauders of Chmielnicki killed well over 100,000 innocent Ukrainian Jews. Scores of communities were totally wiped out. In one town there was a widow with an only child, a sweet toddler who symbolized to his mother all the world's wealth. The Chmielnicki barbarians arrived, snatched the innocent child from his mother's bosom and mercilessly murdered him in her presence. "The mother was obviously a woman of great spiritual caliber. As the murderers left she stretched her arms toward the heavens, and, standing over her deceased child's body, she proclaimed: 'Ribbono Shel Olam, You have placed in each person's chest a heart so that it serve as a repository for Your love, as the pasuk states, "You shall love Hashem, your G-d with all your heart." As a simple mortal, I could not love You with all my heart, since part of my heart contained boundless love for my one and only darling son. Now, however, that my child has ascended to Gan Eden, sanctifying Your Holy Name to join the martyrs of millennia, my heart is available exclusively for loving You.' " The Chofetz Chaim concluded: "My entire life I was striving to love You infinitely, without limits. Yet, man has limitations. You, Hashem, endowed all living beings with great love for their offspring. Now that Avrohom has passed away, I shall redirect to You the love that I had allocated for him."

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The mayor of Tel aviv, Mr. Dizengorf was invited to a group of beduins for a cultural exchange. He sat with them in their tents and had a very pleasant meeting. He was interested in the way they were able to live without any technology, in the harsh desert. As a gift they told him he can take anything in the tent back with him. He took an attractive pipe. He reciprocated by inviting them to his home in Tel Aviv. They had a very pleasant meeting. He then offered them anything in his home. A lack of water was a problem for them. They looked around and were so impressed at the sink which apparently produced an endless supply of water. He told them he was planning on replacing his kitchen sink soon, so he gave them the box of the new sink. They traveled with the sink back to the desert, excited that the sink will provide unlimited water. They gathered all the elders to watch the sink in action, but were frustrated that the sink did not work at all in the desert. Angrily they went back to Mayor Dizengorf that the sink did not work. He told them that the sink only worked if it is attached to the source, the water supply, through the system of pipes. This is a parable for the benefits of Torah. People want the benefits of the dynamic that the Torah provides, but that doesn't just come from the sink. It comes from the fact that their lifestyle is connected to Hashem. Without a connection to the source, it will not work, and will not provide its blessings. If "Azvu mekor mayim chaim" (Yirmiyahu 2,18) it will not work.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Bobover Rebbe's minhag at an upsheren was to playfully spin a coin, entertaining the child before asking him to read the alef beis. He was insistent that the child read of his own volition, without being forced, and would use his remarkable powers of persuasion to make the child comfortable. The first steps of a child onto the path that he will Walk until eternity must be willing ones, happy ones.

Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO ONLY WANT WHAT HASHEM WANTS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is the way of a devoted lover to address his beloved as 'my heart,' meaning that every thought and yearning within his heart is dedicated exclusively to fulfilling the desires of his beloved, their hearts bound together in love. In this manner, a person should address his Creator as his beloved and faithful Guardian, as Scripture states: 'God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever' (Tehillim 73:26). Scripture likewise proclaims: 'I sleep, but my heart is awake' (Shir HaShirim 5:2), which our Sages expounded as referring directly to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the eternal heart of Israel.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred when Rabban Gamliel went to Chalfa ben Karuya and said to him: 'Pray for me!' Chalfa blessed him from Psalm 20: 'May the Lord fulfill all your petitions!' (Yemalle Hashem kol mish'alotecha), rather than saying 'May He grant you according to your heart'—because a human heart sometimes desires things that are not for its own good, whereas when a person brings his petition before Hashem in prayer, he asks only for what is upright and good!

Midrash Tehillim (Shochar Tov) 20:5

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Yoel Gold told the following story. About 20 years ago, he was learning in the Yeshivah of Rav Shlomo Breuer when he got a phone call from his rebbe, Rav Dovid Trenk. His rebbe said, "I want to go from Lakewood to so-and-so's chasunah. Do you know where it is?" Rav Gold answered, "As far as I know, it's in Ateres Avrohom in Williamsburg." The next day, Rav Gold met a friend who had been at the chasunah. He asked him, "How was the wedding in Ateres Avrohom?" His friend looked at him and said, "What? The wedding was in the Atrium in Monsey." Rav Gold said, "Oh no. I told Rav Dovid Trenk that it was at Ateres Avrohom in Williamsburg, Brooklyn." He was so embarrassed to call and find out what happened, but he called Rav Dovid to apologize. When Rabbi Gold called, Rav Dovid smiled and said, "Yes, I went to Ateres Avrohom, but don't feel the least bit bad. Do you know why? Because from sheishes yemei bereishis, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world, He already put into the plan that Dovid Trenk would have to sit for three hours in traffic on the way from Lakewood to the chasunah, and three hours back. You were just the shliach of Hashem." Rav Gold asked, "But what happened at the chasunah? What did you do?" His rebbe said, "I walked in, and it was a Ger's chasunah. I didn't recognize anyone. I got into the middle, grabbed the chosson, and danced with him, even though I didn't know a soul." Rav Gold concluded that Rabbi Trenk would never have mentioned anything or said a word about it if he, Rav Gold, hadn't brought it up. What do we take from this story? We see the incredible emunah and bitachon Rav Trenk had. He didn't view his talmid as the one who caused him to go to the wrong chasunah. He didn't see him as someone who caused him to waste time or sit in traffic for three hours there and three hours back. All he saw was one thing: HaKadosh Baruch

Hu, the Ribbono Shel Olam, had already planned from sheishes yemei bereishis that this is what would happen. That is what we have to take. Everything that happens in our lives was programmed from the moment the world was created. When HaKadosh Baruch Hu made the world and perfectly designed how it would run, everything that happens in our lives was already planned from sheishes yemei bereishis.

Table Talk, Edition 470 (Parshas Shelach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ A weighty problem that was facing Lakewood came to the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon. He recognized that only R' Elyashiv had the shoulders broad enough to answer such a question, so he made a special trip to Eretz Yisrael just to discuss it with him. When the Mashgiach came in, R' Elyashiv stood up to his full height in the Mashgiach's honor and asked him, "Vos macht ayer America - How is your America doing?" After making some small talk, Rav Mattisyahu asked all those present to leave so that he could talk privately with R' Elyashio about sensitive matters regarding Lakewood. Everyone left... or so it seemed. Then, just as Rav Mattisyahu was about to broach the topic that had warranted a special trip to Eretz Yisrael, he noticed one person hiding under the table. One of those in the room was so curious to hear the private conversation between the two gedolim that he hid under the table! Rav Mattisyahu remained with R' Elyashiv for a few minutes, and then he left. After the meeting, one of Rav Mattisyahu's closest people, who had left the room as requested, approached the Mashgiach to find out, "What did R' Elyashiv pasken?" He was flabbergasted when Rav Mattisyahu told him, "I never even discussed the shailah!" "What?!! But, but..." he stammered, "the Mashgiach flew to Eretz Yisrael JUST to ask the shailah! The Mashgiach left his myriad responsibilities and duties in Lakewood, undertaking this arduous trip to Eretz Yisrael because he needed a psak that only R' Elyashiv could render, and the Mashgiach didn't ask the question?!" "What could I do?" The Mashgiach's temimus permeated his words. "When I noticed someone under the table, I was in a quandary. The conversation that I was about to initiate with R' Elyashiv had to be completely private. For various reasons, privacy was not negotiable. Yet, if I were to acknowledge the person's presence and ask him to leave, I would be embarrassing him. I couldn't take that achrayus. To embarrass another Yid?! Instead, I made small talk with R' Elyashio, and when the person still didn't leave, I wrapped up the conversation and left." "But how could the Mashgiach just leave when he so desperately needs an answer from R' Elyashiv?" the talmid pressed. Rav Mattisyahu's reply was profound, profound in its simplicity and profound in its depth! "When you do what Hashem wants, you don't lose," he answered. "Hashem didn't want me to embarrass another Yid, especially in front of the gadol hador!"

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Oitzer Seforim brings the following powerful story. There was once a man who owned a printing press. He was very successful and made a comfortable parnassah (livelihood). One day, another man decided to open a printing press, not just anywhere, but directly across the street. The original owner thought to himself, "This fellow is opening right across from me?" After considering what to do, he made a decision. "I know what I'm going to do. I'll go over and greet him warmly." He walked across the street and said, "Shalom aleichem! I've been in this business for many years. Baruch Hashem, I have good equipment and have learned a lot along the way. If you ever need any utensils, any advice, anything at all, I'd be glad to help." When his family heard what he had done, they were astonished. "Tatti," they said, "this man is your direct competitor. He's taking away your customers and your parnassah. And you're offering him your tools and inside knowledge? What are you thinking?" The father explained, "You don't understand. I owe this man hakaras hatov (gratitude). On Rosh Hashanah it is decreed exactly how much I will earn this year. As long as I make my proper hishtadlus (effort), I will receive that amount, not a penny more, not a penny less. Now that this person has opened across the street, some of my customers will go to him. That means I'll be less busy, I'll have more time to learn, daven, and do mitzvos but my income will remain the same. So in truth, this man is helping me, and for that, I should thank him."

Table Talk, Edition 457 (Parshas Ki Seitzei), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Rav Yaakov Galinsky once wanted a boy to get into a certain yeshivah, but the acceptance committee rejected him. What did R' Yaakov do? He was ninety-one years old then, elderly and weak, but he wasn't willing to give up. He never had. He took a taxi to the yeshivah, and when he saw that the gates were locked (studies hadn't started yet), he asked for a chair, climbed up on the fence, and jumped down... to convince the Rosh Yeshivah to accept the boy.

From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, By Rebetzin G. Lehrer

❖ Rabbi Mordechai Machlis shared a story about his wife, Rebbetzin Henny Machlis, at her levayah: There was a destitute, lonely man whom Rabbi Machlis would often see at the Kosel. One day, he invited him home for a meal. That night, Henny served her homemade whole wheat pizza, and the man loved it. He began coming back every day, asking for another slice. Finally, Henny suggested that instead of coming each time, she would teach him how to make the pizza himself. With care and patience, she showed him step by step, repeating it until he understood. A few nights later, at three in the morning, there was loud knocking. Not on the front door, that door was always unlocked. The knocking was on their bedroom door. Startled, Rabbi Machlis got up and asked, "Who's there?" "It's me," the man answered. "What's wrong?" "I forgot how to make the whole wheat pizza. I need your wife to explain it to me again." Even Rabbi Machlis, known for his patience, felt a moment of exasperation. "At three in the morning, you need to remember how to make whole wheat pizza?" Henny gently calmed him. "It's a test," she said. "It's from Hashem." Then she got up, and once again, step by step, she taught him how to make the pizza.

Table Talk, Edition 486 (Parshas Tzav), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

B. TO FEEL AS IF YOU CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT HASHEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Similarly, it is the way of an ardent lover to address his beloved as 'my soul,' signifying that parting from the beloved is as intolerable as the soul departing from the body, which causes immediate death. In this same spirit, one who loyally loves his Creator should address Him as 'my soul.' Scripture declares: 'For love is as fierce as death' (Shir HaShirim 8:6), teaching that parting from Hashem is as painful as the soul's separation from the flesh. The profound reason for this is that Hashem is the very Soul of our soul.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 1)

True and enduring pleasure is the pleasure of closeness to Hashem and basking in the radiance of the Shechinah. Olam Haba can be compared to a long sea voyage: only the provisions and food prepared before boarding sustain a person during the crossing. Mitzvos performed in this world are the spiritual sustenance of the World to Come; without them, a soul starves in eternity. Furthermore, a foretaste of this transcendent joy is accessible even in this world when a person lives with continuous dveikus and love for Hashem.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Our Sages taught: Once, the wicked Roman Empire decreed that the Jewish people should not occupy themselves with the Torah. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva gathering assemblies in public and occupying himself with Torah. He said to him: 'Akiva, are you not afraid of this nation?' Rabbi Akiva replied: 'Let me tell you a parable. To what is the matter comparable? To a fox who was walking along the bank of a river and saw fish darting from place to place. He said to them: "Why are you fleeing?" They answered: "From the nets that people cast against us." He said to them: "Would you like to come up onto the dry land, and you and I will dwell together, just as my ancestors dwelt with your ancestors?" They answered him: "Are you the one of whom they say is the cleverest of animals? You are not clever, but foolish! If we are afraid in the place of our vitality, how much more so in the place of our death!" So too with us: now that we sit and occupy ourselves with Torah, of which it is written, "For it is your life and the length of your days," we are afraid; if we were to abandon it, how much more so!' Only a few days passed before they seized Rabbi Akiva and imprisoned him in the jailhouse, and they seized Pappus ben Yehudah and imprisoned him beside him. Rabbi Akiva said to him: 'Pappus, what brought you here?' Pappus replied: 'Praised are you, Rabbi Akiva, who was seized for words of Torah; woe to Pappus, who was seized for idle matters!'

Talmud Bavli, Berachos 61b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Elimelech Biderman (top) recalls how Rav Yaakov Galinsky (middle) once received a letter from the Chazon Ish (bottom). The Chazon Ish addressed the letter, "With respect to my friend." Rav Yaakov used to say that when he passed away, he wanted them to place this letter into his grave. The reason was that when he would face the ultimate Judgment, he would know that he had a friend there with him. What better friend to have than the Chazon Ish? Rav Elimelech continues: One day, I met Rav Yaakov, and he informed me that he was retracting his original request. He no longer wanted the letter from the Chazon Ish to be placed into his grave. I was perplexed! What could have happened to change his mind? Clearly, my reaction was noticed by Rav Yaakov, so he alleviated my concern. Rav Yaakov explained that the reason for this change was that while davening, he noticed that it states, Yedidim he'evarta, "The dear ones were brought across," referring to the Jews who crossed the Yam Suf. This is recited during the Shirah before Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharis. "In essence the verse is saying that every Jew is a friend of Hashem's. There is no need to announce that you are a friend of the Chazon Ish!" There is much to be gained from this short story. We should never become despondent, but rather remember that every one of us can be comforted by realizing that Hashem is our "dear friend."

From Experience Greatness by Rabbi Moshe Hubner

❖ The subject of the first parable is the verse not upon Me have you called, O' Yaakov, for you have been weary of Me, O Israel." Two merchants hired the same wagon driver deliver goods back from the fair to their respective addresses. One had a small casket of precious stones; the other - a cumbersome crate full of iron and lead. When the wagon arrived at their hometown the porter who unloaded it confused the two boxes, and delivered the heavy crate to the home of the gem merchant. When the latter offered him a token fee for the delivery of a small casket, the porter protested: "Is that how much you offer me for lifting such a mammoth crate?" "My good man," the gem merchant corrected him. "If the box you brought here was hard to carry, then it most certainly isn't mine. My goods involve no exertion whatever!" "And this," said the Maggid of Dubno, "is what the Prophet says in God's name: 'Not upon Me have you called, O Yaakov'; and the proof of this is the second half of the verse: 'For you have become weary of Me, O Israel.' From My merchandise one doesn't grow weary."

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 211

C. TO SING SONGS OF LOVE TO HASHEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-6

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is the natural expression of true love to pour forth songs of devotion. Because love for our Creator infinitely surpasses all earthly affection, one who loves Hashem with a complete heart should sing songs of adoration before Him, just as Moshe, Klal Yisroel, Miriam, Devorah, Yehoshua, the sons of Korach, David, and Shlomo sang through Ruach HaKodesh. Thus Scripture states: 'A maskil, a song of love' (Tehillim 45:1), and: 'The Song of Songs, which is Shlomo's' (Shir HaShirim 1:1), which our Sages expound as the song dedicated to the King to whom all peace belongs. Scripture likewise commands: 'Sing to Him, chant praises to Him' (Tehillim 105:2). In this vein, the Ra'avad explains that scriptural declarations of love are expressions of holy song, akin to the melodies of David. Animated by this immense love for Hashem, great luminaries throughout the generations composed sacred songs of praise before Him, including Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, Rabbi Yehuda HeChassid, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, and their holy colleagues.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ After lighting the Chanukah candles, the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) would sing the traditional songs. Once he gave an explanation of the Spiritual value of melodies. "If someone doesn't learn mussar, at least a melody can come and arouse some fear of Heaven in him."

The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 264

D. TO PUSH OFF SLEEP BECAUSE OF LOVE FOR HASHEM AND DESIRE TO BE CLOSE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-7

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Just as an ardent lover who is lovesick with longing cannot sleep, so too one who loves his Creator postpones sleep because of the sweetness of His remembrance. As the Chovos HaLevavos (Duties of the Heart) writes: a person should not fall asleep except upon the couch of Hashem's love, nor awake without the sweetness of His memory. One should strengthen himself like a lion after midnight to rise and praise Him, meditating upon His greatness, delighting in His presence, and singing the song of Torah just as King David did, as Scripture states: 'At midnight I arise to give thanks to You' (Tehillim 119:62). Scripture likewise states: 'So He gives His beloved sleep' (Tehillim 127:2), which our Sages expounded as referring to Torah scholars who banish sleep from their eyes in order to labor in Torah study; out of profound love for Hashem, they sacrifice sleep to immerse themselves in His Torah and experience the sublime joy of closeness to Him.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When young David fled from King Shaul to Shmuel HaNavi in Ramah, they sat together studying how to determine the exact spot of the future Beis HaMikdash! They unrolled the Book of Yehoshua and noticed that in the border descriptions of all the other tribes, Scripture states that the border 'went up' and 'went down' — whereas in the border of the tribe of Binyamin, Scripture states 'and the border ascended,' without ever saying 'and it descended'! From this they deduced that the Temple site stood at the spiritual summit of the Land. At first they thought to build it at the high spring of Ein Etam, which was the highest point of all; but then they recalled Moshe's blessing to Binyamin (Devarim 33:12): 'And between his shoulders He dwells' — teaching that the Sanctuary stands not on the proudest crown of the head, but slightly lower 'between the shoulders' on Mount Moriah, twenty-three cubits below the spring of Ein Etam!

Talmud Bavli, Zevachim 54b (108:5-6)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Meilech Biderman wrote: A distinguished young Torah scholar, a great talmid chacham and a man of exceptional yiras Shamayim, once related the following story to us: "For many years, I have been learning in the 'Kollel Chatzos' at Kever Rochel, beginning at midnight and continuing until after Shacharis, which we daven at vasikin. One night, some time ago, I drove to Kever Rochel at midnight to learn as usual. When I arrived, however, the guard at the main entrance refused to allow me in. He told me that entry to Kever Rochel was not permitted. I asked him, 'How long will it be closed?' 'The entire night,' the guard replied. With no other choice, I turned around and drove home. "When I arrived home, I discovered my daughter, who was then a kallah preparing for her wedding, in a terrifying condition. Her face had swollen badly and she could no longer breathe. She had apparently eaten something without realizing that she was allergic to it. She was completely unable to catch her breath and was already at death's door, Heaven forbid. I immediately called Hatzalah. They rushed her to the hospital, where, baruch Hashem, her life was saved. "The following day, I came to understand two extraordinary things. First, I saw the incredible extent of the Hashgachah Elyonah. I asked my friends and fellow members of the kollel where they had been the previous night. They had no idea what I was talking about. Everything had been completely normal! The gate had opened as usual, everyone had entered Kever Rochel, and they had learned there just as they did every other night. It suddenly became clear to me that this particular guard had been an emissary sent from Shamayim to save our daughter. My wife had been home, but my daughter, who could no longer breathe, was incapable of calling out even to the other members of the household for help. It was only because I walked into the house at exactly the right moment, at the very last possible moment, that I discovered her in that condition. Had I returned home even a few moments earlier or later, there might have been no one there to save her at precisely the moment she needed it. "Second, I learned that the entire episode had appeared to be hester panim, as though Hashem's presence was hidden from me. Here was some 'chutzpadik' guard, seemingly for no reason at all, mistreating me and preventing me from entering the kollel, stopping me from learning Torah and serving Hashem. But in truth, it was the exact opposite. It was an extraordinary he'aras panim, a revelation of Hashem's kindness, arranged in order to save my daughter's life.

Table Talk, Edition 509 (Parshas Rosh Hashanah), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ A prominent Ashkenazi Rosh Yeshivah once related that during the 1960s, he lived near Harav Ovadia Yosef's home in Tel Aviv, when the latter served as the city's chief rabbi. One night, there was a blackout in the homes on the Rav's block, but the streetlights were working. 'At 11 p.m. I saw Harav Ovadia standing outside, under a lamppost, and learning. The next morning, when I was leaving for the vatikin minyan, I passed the Rav's home and saw him in the exact same pose, learning by the light of that streetlamp. We have to respect someone who is capable of such hatmadah. "

Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

E. TO THINK ABOUT THE GREATNESS OF HASHEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-22

As it says "you shall know today and return this to your heart that God is your God (Devarim 4:29, Parshas Va'eschanan)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred duty to meditate deeply upon the greatness of Hashem, as Scripture commands: 'Know this day, and take it to your heart, that Hashem is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is none else' (Devarim 4:39). King David similarly proclaimed: 'Hashem looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there is any who understands, who seeks after God' (Tehillim 14:2). Furthermore, Scripture urges: 'Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who has created these?' (Yeshayahu 40:26).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Nehorai Saba once set sail upon the Great Sea when a mighty tempest arose and the ship was wrecked. A miracle occurred for him: he descended through hidden pathways in the heart of the sea and emerged into a populated realm beneath the ocean floor, where he beheld diminutive beings who plowed and harvested and studied words of prayer. When he asked how he could return to the upper world, a guide led him back through a subterranean crevice to the shore in the blink of an eye. Weeping with awe at the boundless wonders of the Creator, Rabbi Nehorai exclaimed: 'Praiseworthy are the righteous who fathom the secrets of the Torah! How manifold are Your works, O Lord; in wisdom have You made them all!'

Zohar III, 10a (Parshas Vayikra)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once a bachur came to talk to Rav Chaim Kanievsky about his difficulty in finding a shidduch. While speaking, he pointed out the obvious: a large scar marred his face. "This is probably the reason I get so many rejections," he said despondently. Rav Chaim asked, with passion in his eyes, "How did you get this scar?" The bachur responded that a few years earlier, he was in the Old City of Yerushalayim and saw an Arab chasing a Jewish girl. In order to protect the girl, he pursued the Arab, and a scuffle ensued. During the fight, the Arab stabbed his face repeatedly, and when the wounds healed, his face was permanently scarred. "When the next shidduch is arranged for you, tell the girl how you became scarred," Rav Chaim advised. The young man followed these instructions on the next shidduch date. Upon the conclusion of his recital of this story, the girl asked for more details about the incident. Finally, visibly moved, she exclaimed, "I am that girl, the one you saved! Ever since that day, I have wanted to find you and thank you for saving me." The two married, and the young lady became very close to Rebbetzin Kanievsky. "If a shidduch is bashert," Rav Chaim would conclude after repeating this incident, "Hashem works a unique chain of events to bring it to fruition."

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

❖ Kalman, an orphaned boy from Lakewood, attended Camp Achim. At one point during the summer, Rav Matisyahu Salomon happened to be in the Catskills, so he made a point of visiting Kalman in Camp Achim. Not only did he visit him, but he schmoozed with him and asked that Kalman show him his bunkhouse, just like any father. When the leadership of

the camp realized that such a giant was in their midst, they begged him to address the entire camp. Rav Mattisyahu refused. "If I end up speaking for the camp, Kalman will think that I came to speak, and while I was there, I also visited him. In truth, however, I came to visit Kalman! I want him to feel good about it."

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

F. TO REMEMBER ALL OF THE KINDNESS HASHEM HAS SHOWERED UPON US

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-23

As it says "you shall remember the path that Hashem traveled with you with these forty years in the desert and He fed you the Manna and your clothes did not wear out" (Devarim 8:2, Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a mitzvah to remember the lovingkindness of Hashem and to contemplate it deeply, as Scripture states: 'And you shall remember all the way which Hashem your God led you these forty years in the wilderness... and He fed you with manna... your clothing did not wear out upon you' (Devarim 8:2–4). From this we derive a clear kal va-chomer: if we are commanded across all generations to remember the benevolence shown to our ancestors, then certainly every Jew is obligated to acknowledge the constant kindness Hashem performs for Klal Yisroel at every moment, continually delivering us from the jaws of the nations who rise up to destroy us. Furthermore, each individual must reflect upon the personal kindnesses Hashem has bestowed upon him from the moment he was formed in his mother's womb, inspiring him to humble himself before Hashem, feel reverent shame over his shortcomings, and return to Him in complete repentance (teshuvah).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 8)

The more a person contemplates Hashem's boundless love and personal benevolence toward him, the more naturally an ardent sense of alacrity and gratitude will awaken within his heart to serve Him.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Chelbo, Rabbi Avira, and Rabbi Yose bar Chanina once visited a certain town in the Land of Israel where a single peach brought before them was as large as a village pot of Kfar Hino; after they ate a third of it, gave a third to their animals, and left a third, their animals were satisfied! Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi once visited Gavla and saw grape clusters standing among the vines as large as calves! He asked in amazement: 'Are there calves standing among the grapevines?!' They answered him: 'Those are clusters of grapes!' Rav Chisda asked: 'What is the meaning of the verse (Jeremiah 3:19), "And I gave you a desirable land, the heritage of a deer (nachalas tzvi)"? Why is the Land of Israel compared to a deer?' He explained: 'Just as a deer's hide expands to accommodate its growing body, so too the Land of Israel expands whenever the Jewish people dwell upon her and overflows with her fruits! And just as the deer is the swiftest of all animals, so too the Land of Israel ripens her fruits more swiftly than all other lands—and her fruits are richer than milk and sweeter than

honey!' When Rabbi Elazar ascended from Babylonia to the Land of Israel, he rejoiced: 'I have escaped one curse!' When they ordained him (with Semichah), he said: 'I have escaped two!' And when they seated him on the council for sanctifying the calendar, he said: 'I have escaped all three!'

Talmud Bavli, Kesubos 111b–112a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A person once asked Rav Avigdor Miller why Hashem made it hot and humid. Rav Miller answered with the following analogy. A man comes home and he has to go through the kitchen in order to go to the restroom. He tells his wife, "What? In this hot weather, you're cooking? It's too hot in here." So she says, "Yes, dear, I'll turn off the stove," and she turns off the stove. He comes out and he says, "Is supper ready?" And she says, "Sorry, not today." So, too, in September all the ripe red apples are out on the stands. How does an apple become red, juicy, and sweet? It's only because Baruch Hu turns on the heat. The summer is the "kitchen" that ripens delicious fruits that we are going to eat all winter. So the next time it is hot and humid, rather than complain, we should think of the good times that are waiting for us.

From Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and Revolution, By Yaakov Y. Hamburger, Published by Judaica Press,

❖ Many years ago, in New York, a family was having trouble making ends meet. It got to the point where the father had no choice but to ask for handouts. He would send his oldest son, Jacob, knocking on doors in Jewish communities, requesting tzedakah. Jacob would be given a couple of dollars here and a couple of dollars there, and it would help support the family. Jacob always wanted to become a doctor, and his family wanted to support him as much as they could. Every night, when Jacob came back with money, his parents would take a dollar or two and set it aside for his future medical education. In the winter, in the freezing cold, it was especially difficult for Jacob to make his rounds. One night, he knocked on a door that had a sign outside: Levinstein Family. A young woman opened the door. "Please," Jacob said, "if you could give me just a little tzedakah, I would appreciate it." She checked her pockets for money, but didn't have any. Her father yelled down from upstairs, "Noa! Who's there?" "Someone for tzedakah!" she called back. "Enough with these collectors!" the father screamed in anger. "They come all the time! Don't give them a penny." The young lady felt bad. Well, if she couldn't offer him money, she could at least offer him a hot drink. She invited Jacob to come in for a minute and made him a cup of hot cocoa. Jacob could not remember the last time he drank something so delicious. The warm house and the warm beverage re-energized him, and he left in good spirits, thanking the nice young woman, Noa Levinstein, for her hospitality. Twenty-two years later, Jacob was the top physician in his field and head of his unit in the hospital where he worked. One day, a patient was brought in with a rare, life-threatening illness. Her name was Noa Markovitz, and her father's name was Abe Levinstein (this information was filled out as part of her registration). Jacob remembered the name Noa Levinstein. This was the girl who had given him hot cocoa years earlier! From that moment on, Jacob went above and beyond anything a doctor would normally do for a patient. He personally paid for very expensive medications that the hospital did not provide. He flew in a doctor who he knew would be able to help. The treatment and care lasted for almost a year, and baruch Hashem, at the end of this time, Noa was back to normal. The time came for her to be discharged, and her husband and children were anxiously waiting in the hallway to bring her home. Her husband was given a large bill for the extensive treatments, somewhere in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. At the end of the bill were written the words: "Paid in full with a cup of hot cocoa." Noa's little deed was something that Jacob would never forget. He repaid her for it many, many times over because it was so precious to him. All our deeds are unimaginably precious to Hashem and He will pay us for each one of them in the future, many, many times over.

As told by Rabbi David Ashear (Table Talk, Edition 424, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Rav Avigdor Miller's daughter once passed him as he was walking down the street, engrossed in his thoughts. She approached him and said, “Hello, Papa. He responded, “Oh, how are you? I was just thanking Hashem that you are married!" “What?” she said incredulously. “But I’m married over forty years, Why now?” He replied matter—of-factly, “I

thank Hashem every day that I married you off."

From Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and Revolution, by Yaakov Y. Hamburger, published by Judaica Press

G. TO MAKE ALL PEOPLE LOVE HASHEM AS WELL

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-9

As it says, And you shall love Hashem your God" (Devarim 6:5 Parshas Va'eschanan)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The commandment to love Hashem encompasses the duty to teach Torah and share words of inspiration with others, planting the love of God firmly in their hearts. The command 'And you shall love Hashem your God' (Devarim 6:5) is expounded by our Sages in the Sifrei to mean: 'Make Hashem beloved to all humanity,' just as Avraham our forefather did, as Scripture records: 'And the souls that they had made in Charan' (Bereishis 12:5). By conducting oneself with righteousness and integrity, one causes the Name of Heaven to be cherished by all who witness his ways; on account of this devotion, Hashem referred to him as 'the seed of Avraham, My beloved' (Yeshayahu 41:8).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ On the verse (Psalms 147:19–20), 'He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and ordinances to Israel; He has not done so for any other nation,' the Midrash relates: Once Aquila (Onkelos), the nephew of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, came before his uncle Hadrian and said to him: 'I wish to convert and become part of the people of Israel!' Emperor Hadrian exclaimed in astonishment: 'Is that the nation you wish to join?! How much have I humiliated that nation, how many of them have I slain! Do you really wish to mingle yourself with the most downtrodden of all peoples? What have you seen in them that makes you want to convert?' Aquila answered him: 'Even the smallest schoolchild among them knows how the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world—what was created on the first day and what was created on the second day, how many years have passed since the creation of the universe, and upon what moral foundation the world stands—and their Torah is absolute truth!' Hadrian said to him: 'Go then and study their Torah if you wish, but do not circumcise yourself and enter their covenant!' Aquila replied to the Emperor: 'Even the wisest scholar in your entire empire, or an elder a hundred years old, cannot truly grasp their Torah unless he enters the covenant of circumcision—for so it is written: He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and ordinances to Israel! To whom does He reveal them? To the children of Israel!'

Shemos Rabbah 30:12

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Moshe Faskowitz, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivah Madreigas HaAdam, posed the following question to Rav Pam: The new schools Rav Pam proposed to open for Russian immigrant children in America were going to require millions of dollars in tzedakah funding. In all likelihood, there would be only a small percentage of children who would graduate from these schools and continue on to "higher" Torah education and develop into genuine bnei Torah. On the other hand, American boys and girls with little religious background seemed very receptive to kiruv (Jewish outreach) programs in their areas. Would it not be wiser to take the millions of dollars destined for Russian schools, and channel it towards a major kiruv effort in this country? This is what Rav Pam answered: Imagine a businessman who had borrowed a large sum of

money and for many years could not repay it. One day, fortune smiled upon him and he won a huge sum in a lottery. Now, there were two things he could do with the money: either invest it in some new; profitable venture, or repay his old debt. Obviously, the right thing to do would be to repay the debt. Since the end of the Second World War, continued Rav Pam, Torah learning has spread from one end of the earth to the other in a supernatural way. Such flourishing of Torah can only come about as the result of true mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice). While many American bnei Torah do make sacrifices for Torah, theirs do not come close to the sacrifices which were made in pre — War Europe, where Torah students literally" went hungry to study and parents who lived in poverty-Went without basic necessities so that their sons could learn. Where, then, is the mesiras nefesh that has brought about such a miraculous rebirth of Torah learning around the globe? It was the mesiras nefesh of Russian Jews behind the Iron Curtain, Rav Pam maintained, which brought about the world-wide renaissance of Torah learning since the war. The tefillos and tears shed by parents and grandparents that their children should live to serve Hashem mothers and fathers who risked imprisonment so that a baby boy could have a bris milah; the sacrifices of young men who eagerly allowed themselves to be circumcised when mohelim arrived for this purpose in the 1960's; the risks taken by parents to give their children Jewish names and to teach them Aleph-Beis; these acts and more are what brought about the siyata diShmaya (Heavenly assistance) which built Torah in the free world. Therefore, Jews in the free world have an obligation to repay their debt to the previous generation of Russian Jews by doing whatever is necessary to give their grandchildren and great-grandchildren a genuine Torah education?

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The following is one of Rav Noach Weinberg's favorite stories, which he told frequently. While on a fundraising trip in Florida, Rav Noach was approached by a Chassid who proudly told Rav Noach that he was responsible for a very old Jew becoming observant. He explained that he had been a nursing home administrator in the Baltimore area, running a home in which there were 297 gentiles and three Jews. He asked a she'eilah and was told that he must serve the Jews only kosher food. The problem was that one very elderly woman did not want kosher food; she wanted the same food as everyone else. One day, one of the state supervisors was on the premises, and the woman called him over and told him she was the victim of religious discrimination, and that the administrator refused to serve her the same food he served everyone else because she was Jewish. The inspector told the administrator that he either had to serve the woman exactly what he served everyone else or he would have to close the nursing home. With his entire livelihood on the line, the Chassid tried to convince the woman in every way possible to withdraw her complaint. He explained that her food cost many times what the non-kosher food cost and tasted better. He got nowhere. "I'm ninety-five years old," she replied. "I don't taste anything. Just give me what everyone else receives." Finally, he had no choice but to convince her to become Torah observant. And he did. "She lights Shabbos candles, makes berachos (blessings) before she eats, washes, everything," the Chassid told Rav Noach. What is fascinating is that the Chassid himself did not remember what arguments he had used. The key words in his account were: "I had no choice." That was the message Rav Noach wanted to convey: Approach every non-religious Jew as if you have no choice but to show them that Torah is the path that will bring them good (tov), blessing (berachah), and life (chaim).

From Rav Noach Weinberg, By Yonason Rosenblum

❖ Until his untimely death Yaakov Herzog (son of Israel's former chief rabbi) was the director-general of the prime minister's office. Once he told me: "Reb Aryeh Levin was not an ordinary person. He was an angel. His wondrous, magical effect on all those around him was immense and extraordinary. "You know: in the days of the mandate the British authorities turned one day to my father (then chief rabbi) and asked him to use his influence with Reb Aryeh and persuade him to visit the Arab prisoners as well (when he made his regular visits to the prison camps). Why? Because they realized that his cheerful, radiant face and clear optimistic look were a heartening and soothing balm. But they were afraid that if

they asked Reb Aryeh directly he would refuse. So for humanitarian reasons they were taking the liberty to ask the chief rabbi to kindly give his help in the matter, "Well, my father went and made the request to Reb Aryeh and he agreed readily and willingly. "After all," said he, " they are also human beings, created in the image of God."

A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim

❖ At a gathering in his honor, Rabbi Meir Shapiro insisted that Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz sit next to him. "Why do you honor me?" Rabbi Shapiro demanded of those present. "You should be honoring him! He is building a yeshivah in a spiritual desert. Do you think it is greater to build a yeshivah in Poland? I wish I could sit next to him in Gan Eden!

Reb Shraga Feivel, By Yonoson Rosenblum, Published by Mesorah Publications

6. To Revere Hashem

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 4

As the Torah says, You shall fear Hashem your God (Devarim 6:13, Parshas Va'eschanan, Devarim 10:20, Parshas Eikev).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How does one develop reverence?
- How does one express his reverence for Hashem?
- How often do we have to have reverence?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The pathway toward acquiring reverent awe of Hashem corresponds to the pathway of cultivating love for Him, as outlined above through deep contemplation of His sublime majesty and wondrous creations.

Whenever a person is confronted by temptation or sin (aveirah), he is obligated to arouse his inner spirit with the acute awareness that the Holy One, blessed is He, scrutinizes every human action and thought.

This is among the constant commandments (mitzvos temidiyos) that a person is obligated to observe at all times without interruption.

Reverent fear of Hashem includes the strict obligation never to pronounce the sacred Name of Heaven in vain or without holy necessity.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

If we develop a reverence for Hashem, that will motivate and inspire us to fulfill His mitzvos, avoid aveiros, and perfect our character, in order to come close to Him

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 432)

Having reverence for Hashem will keep one away from transgressing.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:3)

Yiras Hashem purifies (metaher) one from materialism and brings about the resting of the Divine Presence (hashra'as haShechinah). The degree of reverence that one possesses generates a corresponding degree of spiritual purity (taharah) and resting of the Shechinah. If one constantly lives with awe of Hashem (yiras ha'romemus), then one constantly merits the resting of the Shechinah.

When you have yirah during learning or during mitzvos, then yirah joins with them to perfect the learning or mitzvah.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Yiras Hashem means to see Hashem before you always. It is the equivalent of Shivisi Hashem Lenegdi Tamid.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (HAKDAMA)

Yiras HaRomemus is to realize that before every mitzvah you do, every tefillah you pray, and before any action in general, you are standing in front of a great King. One must be as fully mindful and self-conscious as that.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 24)

Reverence for Hashem (Yiras Shamayim) constantly reminds a person of the eternal consequences of every thought and deed, knowing that he stands always in the presence of the King. The only path to attaining true Yiras Shamayim is through the profound, dedicated study of Torah.

SFAS EMES

• The pasuk says that Hashem asks "only" that we fear Him. If so, how can Moshe describe the demand as though Hashem asks only for Yirah? The Sfas Emes answers: Through genuine Yirah one can reach everything else. Yirah is the opening through which the entire inner world of avodas Hashem becomes accessible. He therefore calls it the outer key (maftei'ach ha-chitzon). A locked palace may contain enormous treasures, but if one lacks the key to the outer door none of them can be reached. It is not just another middah alongside Ahavah and Torah. It creates the posture that allows all the other middos to become genuine (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5632).

• The Sfas Emes states a remarkable principle in Toldos: The truest Yirah can be the child of love. What does a person fear when he deeply loves Hashem? He fears losing the relationship. This transforms the emotional meaning of Yirah. He is no longer primarily afraid of what the King might do to him. He is afraid of damaging the closeness that has become precious to him. This gives the relationship between Avraham and Yitzchak a spiritual meaning. Avraham is the middah of Ahavah; Yitzchak is the middah of Yirah. The verse "Avraham begot Yitzchak" means that true Ahavah gives birth to a new and deeper Yirah. The highest fear is therefore not opposed to love. It is produced by love (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Toldos 5634).

• The Sfas Emes repeatedly teaches that the deepest spiritual powers do not need to be imported into a Jew from the outside. In Eikev he explains that there is an inner bonding and cleaving (hiskashrus u-dveikus) to Hashem within the Jewish soul, but Yirah opens what physicality has closed. This is why the Torah connects the command to fear Hashem with "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart." The spiritual covering (orlah) of the heart is a covering. Yirah is the knife that cuts through that covering and allows the inner truth of the heart and mind to become visible. A person may feel spiritually cold and assume that holiness is foreign to him. The Sfas Emes says that a holy inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) is already there; the Divine service (avodah) is to remove what prevents it from appearing (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5659).

• Chazal derive from the verse "And now, O Israel, what does Hashem your God ask of you, but to fear Hashem your God" (Devarim 10:12) that everything is in the hands of Heaven except Yiras Shamayim. What, then, is left for man himself to contribute? The Sfas Emes answers that the small beginning is Yirah. He calls it the small point that belongs to man in serving his Creator. This is the tiny opening which man must make. Once he opens that door, Hashem opens far greater doors from Above. This gives Yirah a foundational role. Hashem does not demand that man manufacture holiness from nothing. He asks him to turn himself toward Hashem with humility, seriousness, and reverence. That first turn is Yirah, and through it the Divine gifts hidden within him begin to emerge (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5638).

• The Sfas Emes develops a profound interpretation of the word "what" (mah, humble self-nullification) in the verse "What does Hashem your God ask of you?" (Devarim 10:12). The word mah ("what") suggests humble self-nullification: What am I, and what power do I possess independently? True wisdom is to recognize that the power within every creature is actually the power of its Creator. Yirah therefore attacks one of the deepest human illusions—the feeling that the self is independent. A person acts, chooses, thinks, builds, earns, and succeeds, and easily begins to experience himself as the source of his own power. It places his personality in its proper relationship to its Source. Precisely then his individual powers can serve their true purpose (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5638).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the difference between yiras haromemus, and yiras haonesh
- Which is based on self interest? Which is greater?
- Is there a role for Yiras Haonesh?
- Discuss how one way to develop Yiras Shomayim is to learn mussar every day.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

An Israeli undercover intelligence operative was stationed behind enemy lines. Is he permitted to eat without reciting a blessing and without covering his head in order to avoid arousing suspicion and maintain his cover?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that when an undercover security operative behind enemy lines is under mortal duress (ones) and cannot cover his head without exposing his Jewish identity and endangering his life, he is completely exempt from the requirement of covering his head, but he is not exempt from reciting blessings over food; therefore, he should quietly recite the brachos bareheaded (preferably indoors under a roof), since reciting a brachah bareheaded under life-saving duress is permitted rather than forfeiting the brachah entirely.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 204

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One day, Rav Shimshon had just exited Bnei Brak towards Ofakim when he was suddenly struck by a brilliant thought illuminating a complex sugya in maseches Kesubos. Anxious to crystallize his train of thought before he lost it, he desperately scanned the highway for a place to stop. Yet, where exactly could he pull over on the busy Geha Highway? This episode might have been buried alongside countless others attesting to Rav Shimshon's greatness in Torah, avodah, and yiras Shamayim. Yet, Hashem apparently wanted to teach his children and followers a lesson in ahavas haTorah and the compelling obligation to toil in it even "b'lechtecha baderech, on the way..." Several weeks or even months passed before one of Rav Shimshon's sons accompanied him in the car on a short ride. Sticking his hand into the glove compartment in search of an item, he was surprised to find a one-day ticket to the Ramat Gan Safari. His father? At the safari? The boy was puzzled, yet he assumed that his father had accompanied a broken-hearted Jew on a day trip, or that one of the hundreds of hitchhikers who joined Rav Shimshon in the car had dropped it. Still, his curiosity was piqued, and he asked his father about it. "Oh, that?" Rav Shimshon chuckled. "It wasn't a chessed. One day, I bought myself a ticket to the safari." "You?" His son looked at him in disbelief. "You went to the safari?!" "I did, but not to see the animals..." Rav Shimshon confessed, recalling the day when he had passed the Coca-Cola Junction on the way out of Bnei Brak and had been struck by a thought that clarified an entire sugya. Driving down the congested highway in search of somewhere to stop and collect his thoughts in peace, he hadn't found anywhere suitable, but determined that he wouldn't continue home and risk losing this priceless train of thought. Several long moments passed before he spied the tall gated entranceway to the Ramat Gan Safari. On a whim, he turned the steering wheel toward the zoo, deciding that it was an ideal location as any to analyze his epiphany and reevaluate the entire sugya in Kesubos based on it. Thus determined, he drove to the reception booth, doled out the cost of a ticket, and found a quiet, peaceful spot to sit at the far edge of the park under a group of eucalyptus trees. He spent the next two hours meticulously arranging his thoughts and crystallizing his understanding of the thorny sugya. Who knows? Perhaps Hashem planted the thought of building this safari in central Ramat Gan in the minds of its creators just so, one day, Rav Shimshon Pincus would find himself a haven to gaze upon the miracles of creation and create some of his own.

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

❖ The inmates of the Jerusalem prison all adored and respected Reb Aryeh Levin greatly. Although many of them were not observant Jews, they waited with impatience every Saturday morning for the rabbi's weekly visit, so as to draw their spiritual strength from his unique warm and affectionate handshake. Yechezkel Altman was one of the "distinguished" prisoners, since he was sentenced to death. (Later, though, his sentence was commuted; and ultimately he was freed.) These are his recollections: In those grueling days when I wore the red prisoners garb of a condemned man and lived under the shadow of the gallows, Reb Aryeh used to come to visit me very frequently. For this reason I always kept a Kippah (a skull Cap) in my pocket; and when I saw Reb Aryeh from afar, I would put it on my head immediately. Well, in those days there were many communists imprisoned there with me... including one young fellow named Yaakov. He was most insolent and rather nasty, and he kept trying to make Reb Aryeh lose his temper. Thus, for example, whenever he saw Reb Aryeh arriving on Saturday morning to join us in our makeshift synagogue in the prison courtyard, he would light a cigarette before Reb Aryeh's very eyes in order to get him angry; but then he himself would be most irritated because he failed to ruffle the rabbi's calm. You just could not make Reb Aryeh lose his temper. It was his firm habit to greet everyone with the blessing of a good Shabbos. Well one day Reb Aryeh was surprised to see this young communist, Yaakov, waiting for him at the entrance to our makeshift synagogue. As the good rabbi reached the entrance, the young fellow snapped out, "Why do you deal with liars and fakers?" "My son," Reb Aryeh replied, "why do you defame and slander human beings?" "Do you think those prisoners are religious, because they come here Saturday morning and join you in the prayer-service? I live with them in this prison. I see how they eat and drink with nothing to cover their heads in reverence; and they never say a word of blessing or grace to God for their food. Look at that Yechezkel Altman. When he sees you coming from afar, he hurries to

put a skull cap on his head, so that he can appear religious and reverent to you!" "You call those people liars and cheats?" Reb Aryeh chided him. "How wrong you are. Believe me: I never so much as glance at their heads to see if they are wearing any head-covering or not. I focus my thought on their hearts, To me their hearts are open and revealed — and those hearts are aglow with human warmth!" The upshot was that a short while afterward, this Yaakov, who had been so critical of Reb Aryeh, began himself to hurry to put a skull cap on his head at Reb Aryeh's approach, and he became one of the regular visitors in the synagogue.

A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim

❖ There was a young man and a young woman from two different families in a large community in the Diaspora who had somewhat strayed from the path of Torah and yiras Shamayim in which they were raised. They met each other and eventually decided to become engaged. As has become customary in many frum communities, their parents insisted that they go for genetic testing. To their horror, they found out that the two were not genetically compatible. Neither of the families were Gerrer chassidim. They went to consult with their Rav, who told them that such a difficult question, one that is relevant to future generations, needs to be asked of a gadol hador. With their permission, he asked the Pnei Menachem. The Rebbe listened carefully and said, "If the couple accepts upon themselves to conduct their lives completely in accordance with the Shulchan Aruch, with no dispensations, but total and complete adherence to the din, I will accept upon myself the yoke of making sure that all of the children born to them will be healthy and will not suffer from any of the genetic conditions for which they are both carriers." Ultimately, the two turned around completely and built a beautiful Torah home with wonderful, healthy children.

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz often used to say, "The Torah is her own baal habos. She doesn't go just to anyone, only to whom she likes." That is, the Torah never dwells with someone who lacks yiras Shamayim. If someone does not have yiras Shamayim, even if he learns Torah day and night, the Torah will not come to him. He will not understand it properly.

Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim

❖ Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz said about himself that he constantly lived in fear of his yetzer hara. He was fond of saying that each person must always remain vigilant and not forget his duty in this world even for a moment. According to the gaon R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, author of the sefer Seridei Aish, the Grach said that R. Boruch Ber, when he came to the Next World, would not receive reward for refraining from sin, because in this world he was terrified of sin. His reward would be for his fear of sin, not for refraining from sin, for his fear of sin was so great, refraining from sin was something that he had to do, not something that he chose to do.

Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim

A. AS A SIGN OF REVERENCE, DO NOT STARE AT THE MOON AND RAINBOW, WHICH ARE REVELATIONS OF THE SHECHINA

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to gaze intently at a rainbow that appears in a cloud, out of profound reverence for the Divine Presence (Shechinah), as Scripture states: 'As the appearance of the rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around; this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Hashem'

(Yechezkel 1:28). For this same reason, one is forbidden to gaze fixedly at the moon; Rabbi Meir was exceedingly stringent regarding this expression of reverence.

B. TO COVER ONE'S HEAD AS A SIGN OF REVERENCE FOR HASHEM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-35

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the reason for this mitzvah?
- Does this underlying principle extend toward other actions as well?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should accustom himself to speak pleasantly and calmly to all people, conducting himself as if conversing in the presence of a king where one is in awe of raising his voice, because the entire world is filled with Hashem's glory (Yeshayahu 6:3). For this same reason, it is forbidden to walk with an arrogant posture and an outstretched neck (b'komas zekufah), or to walk even four cubits with an uncovered head (gilui rosh), so that the fear of Heaven constantly rests upon a person.

RESPECT FOR HASHEM: REVERENCE & SANCTITY OF SPEECH

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to developing a respect for Hashem. This is the basis of building a relationship to Hashem that will allow us to perfect our character and come close to Him.

7. Not to Pronounce Hashem's Name in Vain

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 29

As the Torah says, You shall not take the name of Hashem your God in vain (Shemos 20:7, Parshas Yisro).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Can one make a berachah whenever he wants?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If a person recites an unnecessary blessing (berachah l'vatalah) or pronounces the sacred Name of Hashem for no legitimate halachic purpose, he violates the biblical negative commandment: 'You shall not take the Name of Hashem your God in vain' (Shemos 20:7). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of our life is to come close to Hashem by perfecting our character to develop G-dlike character traits. We therefore want to give Hashem the upmost respect to remind ourselves and others that coming close to Hashem and obeying Hashem is the purpose of our existence. We therefore want to avoid anything that takes away from this prestige. Not saying Hashem's name unless it is necessary is a way to demonstrate our respect and reverence for Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes gives a concentrated interpretation of the command not to bear the Name of Hashem in vain. Instead of beginning with a discussion of forbidden speech, he begins from the relationship between a person and the God who gives that person life. Every Jew's soul comes from the source of holiness, and the Divine Name rests upon that soul. A person therefore carries something that does not belong to the purely private or mundane realm. The text's expression 'bearing the Name' suggests a responsibility to guard the God-given life one has

received and not make it empty. In this way, the prohibition of lo sisa encompasses both guarding the tongue from uttering Hashem's Name in vain and guarding the holy soul from squandering the divine strength entrusted to it (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shavuos 5636).

• In a long maamar about the wholeness of Torah and its power to restore the soul, the Sfas Emes returns to the words 'Do not bear the Name of Hashem your God in vain.' The argument begins with Torah as more than a collection of instructions. He explains the designation of Shavuos as a day of first fruits in the light of this newly given life. In that context, the warning against bearing Hashem's Name in vain is read as a duty to guard the Divine vitality obtained through revelation. The consequence is sharper than an ordinary rule about avoiding an unnecessary word. The soul is not a possession earned independently by the person. Having received a renewed soul at Sinai through the life-giving dew of Torah, Klal Yisrael is charged by lo sisa never to let that precious heavenly vitality be spent for naught (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5654).

• The second commandment, “You shall not take the Name of Hashem your God in vain” (lo sisa es Shem Hashem Elokecha la-shav), reads at first glance as a law of the mouth — it governs the oath, the word spoken in His Name. Yet in the Pinchas elucidation the Sfas Emes applies this very verse to guarding the covenant of holiness (shemiras ha-bris). The midrashic foundation is the Midrash on “Behold, I give him My covenant of peace” (hineni nosein lo es brisi shalom): covenant (bris) is the inner point, the foundational inner point upon which all reality stands, the point of connection between the upper world and this world — and wherever such a point exists, the Holy One seals His Name upon it. The taam of the lav is therefore not mere reverence of speech but the protection of a seal: to say His Name in vain is to treat as empty what Hashem sealed as full, and the guarding of the Name in the mouth is the model for guarding the Name in the flesh (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5652).

A. NOT TO MAKE AN UNNECESSARY BERACHAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 24-7

As it says, "You shall not take the name of Hashem your God in vain (Shemos 20:7, Parshas Yisro).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Whoever recites a blessing that is unnecessary (berachah she-einah tzrichah or berachah l'vatalah) directly violates the biblical commandment: 'You shall not take the Name of Hashem your God in vain' (Shemos 20:7).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 30)

It is disrespectful to Hashem to say his name for no reason.

B. TO SAY HASHEM'S NAME WITH REVERENCE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-4

As it says "Hashem your God you shall fear" (Devarim 6:13, Parshas Va'eschanan)

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

Included within the commandment of revering Hashem is the obligation never to articulate the sacred Divine Name unless accompanied by deep awe and trembling in one's heart, exclusively for a genuine halachic need or sacred prayer, and never casually or in vain, as Scripture commands: 'Hashem your God you shall fear' (Devarim 6:13).

One who hears a companion mistakenly utter Hashem's Name without purpose is obligated to admonish him gently and educate him, ensuring that he does not repeat this grave error.

The prohibition against uttering Hashem's Name in vain applies in every language. It encompasses taking an oath that was not mandated by a rabbinical court (beis din), swearing a false oath (shevuas sheker), invoking the Divine Name in a curse, employing it in frivolous conversation, or uttering an unnecessary blessing (berachah l'vatalah).

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (3:2)

How would one get Nuvuah? There are mediums that allow you to free yourself from the physical and contact the spiritual beings. The mediums are shemos.

Everything that exists in the cochos, anafim, and physical worlds are because of a hashpah that comes from Hashem. Every single thing that exists receives a particular hashpah which allows it to exist. That hashpah comes from Hashem down through the process of hishtalshulus to all level of creation.

Hashem wants us to call him by his name and thereby come close to him. Hashem himself has a name, but each hashpah for each receiver has a particular name of Hashem as well. Whenever you call that name of Hashem the hashpah comes. Depending on which name you call, you will draw forth a different hashpah. That hashpah will descend down through hishtalshulus to man. Being able to draw this hashpah has specific rules and only when you follow all of the rules can you bring this hashpah.

Among these many hashpas is the hashpah that allows you to free from the physical to attach to the spiritual in order to receive a higher haskalla. This haskalla has a similarity to ruach hakodesh and nevuah in the fact that for ruach hakodesh and nevuah you need to say the shemos in order to get the hashpah that frees you from the physical. Sometimes you have to pronounce the name, other times you have to think it, or combine the name with other words. There are other conditions as well. Even though we don't use sheimos to get nevuah, the same is true for us that when we say Hashem's name, we draw forth a great Hashpa.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

During the Holocaust, the Nazis made a systematic attempt to publicly destroy any Sifrei Torah that were found in the Kovno Ghetto. It was very rare to find a Sefer Torah that could be used to be read publicly in shul. One day, a Jew named Yitzchak joyously walked in with a special prize. He had found a Sefer Torah hidden in mud. After examining the Torah, Yitzchak had the following dilemma. Because of the moisture of the mud, the ink of the scroll became stamped on the parchment in front of it. That piece of parchment now had lettering on both sides. Under normal conditions a Torah that has lettering on both sides is unfit to be used. Yitzchak could simply erase the lettering on the

back of the Torah, but these letters were words of Torah, along with many of G-d's names. Again, normally it would be prohibited to erase words of Torah or the names of G-d. Yitzchak asked Rav Ephraim Oshry the following question. Which choice of action would be preferred in this case? Is it preferable to use a passul, disqualified sefer Torah but not erase the names of G-d, or would it be better to erase the words of Torah in order to be able to use a kosher sefer Torah. On one hand we can't erase G-d's name. Perhaps it is better to use a pasul Torah in order not to erase Hashem's name. But on the other hand, they would be doing so in order to be able to use a kosher Sefer Torah. Maybe it would be permitted to erase Hashem's name in such a situation. Additionally, would letters stamped by accident have the same restriction against erasure as letters that were written intentionally?

Answer: Regarding the question of the Torah found in the Kovno Ghetto, Rav Oshry, who was about 28 years old at the time, told them that if the extra words are readable, and are not backwards, then it would not be permitted to erase them.

— Source: Shailos V'Teshuvos Mimamakim Volume 2 Chapter 14 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 037 (Reeh))

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was an ordinary workday at an Israeli bank, characterized by sullen clerks, rare smiles, and begrudging service. Among them was a clerk adorned with the trappings of secular life: tattoos on her arm, vampire-like fingernails, a wristband bearing a '70s pop buzzword, and a T-shirt advocating for the release of hostages at any cost. After completing his business, Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, (brother of the Rosh Yeshivah Rav Aharon Feldman) on a whim, asked the imperious clerk if she would like a brachah. Her dark demeanor brightened immediately. "A brachah? Yes, by all means!" she exclaimed. In Rabbi Feldman's words, "In keeping with the rabbinic dictum "Al tehi birchas hedyot kallah b'einecha - Do not make light of the blessings of ordinary people," I blessed her and her family with long life, good health, joy, and satisfaction in all her endeavors." She was genuinely moved and thanked him profusely. The clerk nearby, having overheard their exchange, called out, "Me too! Please give me a brachah also." Rabbi Feldman obliged, offering her a similar blessing. She, too, was overjoyed. Soon, voices from further desks chimed in: "How about me?" Before long, the entire bank staff was clamoring for a brachah. What was striking was that although none of the staff appeared to be identifiably religious, no one wanted to miss the chance of receiving the blessing of an elderly rabbi. This made Rabbi Feldman ponder. A simple wish would have been forgotten quickly, but the same sentiments within the framework of a brachah carried much more weight. A wish expresses one person's hopes for another, but a brachah introduces a transcendent element, perhaps even a touch of Divine involvement. "I wish you well" is a fine sentiment, but "may you be blessed" is on an entirely different level. The clerks, though not articulating it, seemed to intuitively grasp this distinction. They weren't merely asking for good wishes; they were reaching for something beyond ordinary understanding, something intangible from the non-material world. They sensed that an elderly rabbi might bring that extra, undefinable component into their lives. One thing was clear: there is no such thing as a vacuous Jewish soul. This soul is constantly in search of meaning and fulfillment; it does not reject G-d and all that He represents. It longs for more, not less, spirituality. Perhaps the root cause of the secular-religious divide is that the religious community has yet to find the formula to bridge this gap. As Rabbi Feldman walked out the door, he noticed a rare phenomenon: the frowns had disappeared, and some of the clerks were actually smiling. For those few moments, the atmosphere in the bank had changed radically.

Based on Rabbi Feldman's first-person account in Mishpacha Magazine

❖ When Rebbetzin Kotler was very ill she lay in her hospital bed unresponsive. A young girl came to visit and the Rebbetzin Rishel Kotler asked her if she had yet prayed the afternoon service. The answer was no. Why then don't you pray now and at the same time hold my mother-in-law's hand. You will experience something very interesting. The girl began

and suddenly felt a weak squeeze just as she said the name of God. Shaken, she continued to pray, only to feel another squeeze upon pronouncing the name of God. This happened again and again throughout the prayers. The Rebbetzin reacted to nothing else at that stage and her illness nonetheless tremored in awe at the mention of the Holy Name of God.

The Living Mishnas Reb Aharon, By Rabbi Yitzchak Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim

C. TO GIVE HONOR TO HASHEM BY DOING MITZVOS WITH A LARGE GROUP

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should always strive to perform mitzvos in the company of a community rather than in isolation, honoring the principle: 'In a multitude of people is the king's glory' (Mishlei 14:28). Concerning Torah study, Scripture warns: 'A sword is upon the solitary, and they become foolish' (Yirmeyahu 50:36), which our Sages expounded to mean that a sword hangs over those who study Torah in isolation, and furthermore, they grow foolish. With all commandments, performing them within a congregation yields far greater spiritual merit. Thus, the Mishnah describes regarding the Paschal offering (Korban Pesach) in the Beis HaMikdash that the Kohanim stood in lines, passing the basins of sacrificial blood from one to the next in order to involve a multitude in the mitzvah, until the Kohen nearest the altar received it and poured it against the base (Pesachim 64a).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Last week, my beloved father in-law, Reb Yehuda Munk, passed away at the age of 82 years old. He worked in the field of finance until six weeks ago when he suffered a serious head injury. In his field of work so many people, both colleagues and clients, define success by the amount of assets they own and how large their portfolios are. For himself, however, he ascribed very little value to money. Extravagant weddings and lavish banquets were not appreciated by him. He loved simplicity. He knew that money was just a means to achieve something greater. That greatness was defined by Torah study and serving Hashem and His people. On one occasion he lent a fellow many thousands of dollars for a period of time. After the time passed and the fellow had not paid it, my father in-law inquired about the person's financial standing. He learnt that the borrower was struggling and refrained from asking him. After some more time passed and the fellow was not forthcoming he discussed his dilemma with his Rov, Rav Shlesinger, who told him that it would be best to forgive the loan and count it as tzedakah. He forgave the loan with no concern. It was only money and its only value was to be a means of achieving k'vod Shamayim. The money turned out to be a great investment.

Table Talk, Edition 186 (Parshas Shelach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner (shared by Paysach Diskind)

❖ King Solomon describes Torah as being dearer than pearls and diamonds (Proverbs 3:15). The Chofetz Chaim comments: The monetary value of diamonds goes up exponentially, depending on the number of carats. If a one-carat stone is worth a thousand dollars, a two-carat stone is valued at much more than two thousand dollars, and a five-carat diamond is worth at least thirty times that amount; the increase in value is disproportionate to the increase in size. Good deeds performed by a large group of people are similar. Their value is increased many times over as the number of participants increases.

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

8. Not to Blaspheme or Curse the Divine Name

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 63

As the Torah says, You shall not revile God (Shemos 22:27, Parshas Mishpatim), and it says, And he who blasphemes the name of Hashem shall surely be put to death; the entire community shall stone him (Vayikra 24:16, Parshas Emor).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is there a difference if he uses Hashem's name itself or one of the Kinuyim, the substitute names?
- If one curses Hashem but retracts it right away, is he culpable?
- What is his punishment nowadays?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This verse constitutes a biblical admonition against blaspheming the Almighty (birkas Hashem). If a person curses Hashem using a substitute Divine title or attribute (kinui), he transgresses a severe negative commandment. If he blasphemes using the explicit Ineffable Name itself, the Torah decrees his capital punishment explicitly: 'And he who blasphemes the Name of Hashem shall surely be put to death; the entire congregation shall stone him' (Vayikra 24:16). Liability is incurred even if the blasphemer immediately recants within the time it takes to utter a short greeting (toch k'dei dibbur).

In our contemporary era, when rabbinical courts no longer administer capital punishment, the court places such a person under formal excommunication (cherem), and the community distances itself from him. This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

SFAS EMES

• The semichus must be the commentary: the mekalel is judged in the company of the murderer because his deed is a kind of killing, and the Torah's own words demand we find what it is that he kills. The Sfas Emes gives the taam in one doctrine: Hashem sealed His Name in the Jewish person, and this sealed point must be guarded so as not to be made chullin. The blasphemer's verdict is placed next to the murderer's because the Name dwells in the soul of Israel, and the one who curses the Name strikes at the divine seal resting in man; it is soul-murder, the striking of the indwelling Name. Cursing Hashem is the active form of that forgetting: the mouth turns against the very Name sealed within the speaker, and that divine seal within the soul is what makes the prohibition so grave (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5661).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of our life is to come close to Hashem by perfecting our character to develop G-dlike character traits. We therefore want to give Hashem the upmost respect to remind ourselves and others that coming close to Hashem and obeying Hashem is the purpose of our existence. We therefore want to avoid anything that takes away from this prestige. Cursing Hashem is obviously a great sign of disrespect for Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RADVAZ

This does not hurt Hashem at all. The gravity of this sin is what it says about the one who says it. The purpose of all creation is to bring greater respect for Hashem. One who does this negates the purpose of his own existence.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 70)

Man's elevation over the animals is through the fact that he can speak. By using speech for such a crime, he destroys his power of speech and is now no different than an animal. Hashem want what is best for us and does not want us do a sin that takes away our humanity.

REJECTING FALSE WORSHIP: ERADICATING IDOLATRY

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to avoiding idolatry and other forms of false worship. This is the basis of building a relationship with Hashem, that helps us perfect our character in order yo come close to Him.

9. Not to Fashion or Own an Idol

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 9

As the Torah says, You shall not make yourself a graven image (Shemos 20:4, Parshas Yisro).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is there a difference if you made it yourself, or if someone else made it for you?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If a person transgresses and causes an idol to be fashioned for himself, whether he crafted it with his own hands or commissioned an artisan to construct it, he violates this negative commandment (Shemos 20:4).

If he fashioned the idol with his own hands for his own possession, he transgresses two distinct biblical prohibitions: this negative commandment against possessing an idol, and the explicit injunction: 'Do not make for yourselves molten gods' (Vayikra 19:4).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (2:7)

Why would people worship the stars or other Gods? All that exists has it root in the cochos, and it has to be drawn from the cochos to this lower world. The pipeline of the hishtalshulus from the higher spiritual worlds to this lower physical one, are the constellations. The life-force that stems from the cochos flows through the constellations.

Not only does the life-force flow through the cochavim but also the direction of events that will happen are drawn from the higher spiritual worlds to the lower physical one through the pipeline of the cochavim. That is why stars and constellations appeared to be Gods

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In his 5631 discourse on Parshas Tetzaveh, the Sfas Emes contrasts the sanctity of the Mishkan—introduced by the command "Do not make with Me gods of silver — An altar of earth you shall make for Me"—with the fatal error of the Golden Calf. Even when a person seeks a tangible spiritual medium through which to draw down heavenly inspiration, the moment he attributes independent authority or autonomous power to any intermediary rather than nullifying every vessel exclusively to Hashem, he fashions a molten mask (massechah) that separates him from the Creator. True holiness rests only upon an 'altar of earth'—a heart that remains utterly humble and transparent before Hashem alone (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Tetzaveh 5631).

• The Sfas Emes examines the Torah's placing side by side of the prohibition against making molten gods with the command to observe the festival of matzos. Why should failure to appreciate the sacred calendar be compared with serving an image? The answer turns upon the meaning of a 'massechah.' In his spiritual reading, a person can create a covering or screen between a visible natural object and its hidden Divine life. The screen causes what is ultimately sustained by Hashem to appear self-existing or independent. He describes Shabbos as the time in which everything returns toward its transcendent root, whereas Yom Tov allows an illumination to enter the ordinary texture of natural life. By contrasting the molten mask (massechah) of idolatry with the luminous transparency of the Festivals, the Sfas Emes shows that we must never allow material forms to harden into a partition concealing the Creator (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5631).

• Draw your hands away from idolatry and take for yourselves a sheep for a mitzvah. It is written, in your bloods, live. But why must the break with the gods of Egypt be the price of freedom? Why could Israel not simply walk out — why did the lamb, the god of Egypt, have to die first, and why does the Sfas Emes (Pesach 5648) make the slaughter of Egypt's god the very gate of the Exodus? Because Pesach is a rectification for the inclination toward idolatry (tikkun le-yitzra da-avodah zarah). And the Sfas Emes seals the teaching with our mitzvah's own verse: therefore the Torah set the festival of Matzos beside "you shall not make for yourself a cast god." The first Jewish act in history was not to keep an idol but to destroy the head of idolatry; the taam of the prohibition is the Exodus itself: a people that began by slaughtering the god of Egypt can never again make a god for themselves or keep one in their house (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shabbos HaGadol 5648).

• The purpose of the Exodus was for Israel to behold the light of the King's countenance. On the three festivals, which are a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt (zecher le-Yetzias Mitzrayim), the light of the face of the living King was revealed upon Israel in the Beis HaMikdash: "In the light of the King's countenance there is life" (be-or pnei Melech chayim). But the verse says He stands behind our wall, peering through the windows. If He is behind the wall, how is He seen? The keeper of the festivals walks through the openings: he sees that nature was never a wall but a window, and the idol — which is only the worship of the wall itself — has nothing left to stand on (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5662).

• The Zohar calls Shabbos complete peace, and Israel is called the Shulammite (Shulamis)—the nation complete in peace. The Sfas Emes heard from his grandfather (Pesach 5632) the reason: Israel clarify the perfection of Hashem, that all perfection is His; and Yom Tov is called the Shulammite (Shulamis, complete in peace) as well — in the festival too the perfection is revealed. But the teaching comes wrapped in a difficulty: why do our Sages teach that one who slights the festivals is as though he worshiped idols? How can the Torah compare him to an idolater, and what screen — what molten idol (maseichah) — has he cast and kept in his house? This is why the

festival is the remedy: the moadim are a testimony for Israel (edus le-Yisrael) that Hashem's perfection fills the world, and one who keeps them with faith testifies against the partition — he dissolves the screen he might have become, and cleaves to the One, for Hashem and His Name are One, and He created everything for His glory (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5632).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Todos a man of Rome expounded a famous teaching: From where did Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah see that they should cast themselves into King Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace for the sanctification of Hashem's Name? They reasoned a Kal VaChomer (a fortiori argument) for themselves from the frogs of Egypt! They said: Regarding the frogs of Egypt, which are not commanded in the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, Scripture states (Shemos 7:28): 'And they shall come into your house, and into your bedroom, and into your ovens, and into your kneading troughs' — and when does a kneading trough sit right next to an oven? When the oven is blazing hot! Yet the frogs leaped straight into the hot Egyptian ovens purely to fulfill the word of their Creator! How much more so should we, who ARE commanded to sanctify Hashem's Name, leap into the fiery furnace rather than bow to an idol!

Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 53b (106:7–8)

A. NOT TO MAKE AN IDOL FOR ANOTHER

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 10

As the Torah says, and do not make yourselves molten gods (Vayikra 19:4, Parshas Kedoshim)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If a person transgresses and manufactures an idol for another person — even for an idolater — he violates this biblical negative commandment (Vayikra 19:4). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can.

B. NOT TO MAKE A STATUE OF A PERSON

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 144

As the Torah says, You shall not make with Me gods of silver, etc. (Shemos 20:20, Parshas Yisro)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Can you make a sunken relief of a person?

- Can you draw a picture of a person?
- Can you draw a picture of the sun and the moon?
- Can you make a statue of animals, or make a picture of animals?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Specifically, crafting a three-dimensional, protruding sculpture (tzurah bolet) of a human figure is biblically prohibited, and one who fashions it violates this negative commandment even if not made for worship.

However, an intaglio image that is sunken in relief (tzurah shoka'as) or a two-dimensional portrait painted on a flat surface is halachically permitted.

If a signet ring contains an engraved seal with a protruding image of a human being, it is forbidden to wear it on one's finger, but permitted to use it as a seal to stamp impressions.

Conversely, if the human likeness on the ring is sunken in relief, it is permissible to wear it, but forbidden to use it as a seal, since pressing it into soft wax will create a prohibited protruding three-dimensional image.

It is strictly forbidden to draw or fashion a likeness of the sun, moon, stars, or constellations, for the Torah commands: 'You shall not make with Me' (Shemos 20:20) — which Chazal expound to mean: do not make the likeness of My celestial attendants that serve before Me in the supernal realm.

Regarding these celestial luminaries, the prohibition applies even to depicting them upon a completely flat surface where they do not protrude at all.

It is permitted, however, to fashion the forms of other living creatures — such as animals, beasts, birds, and fish — as well as the shapes of trees and plants, even in fully protruding three-dimensional sculptured form.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. This mitzvah is a precaution against serving idols.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

OHR HACHAIM

Sometimes a person acknowledges the supremacy of Hashem and feels that this pesel (statue) is just pesoles (refuse) relative to Hashem, but he feels inadequate to pray to Hashem directly, and he prefers to daven to an icon as an intermediary. Nonetheless this mitzvah teaches that we still can't use the idol as an intermediary to Hashem.

C. NOT TO WORSHIP A STRANGE GOD THE WAY WE WORSHIP HASHEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 11

As the Torah says, you shall not bow down to them (Shemos 20:5, Parshas Yisro).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If the worship of a certain idol is not done with bowing, can one bow to it?
- If the worship is not done with offerings, can one offer a korban to an idol?
- If it is not a form of worshiping the idol, can one bow down to an idol if that will save his life?
- if one dropped a coin in front of an idol, should one puck it up?
- Why not?
- What should one rather do?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Because prostration is the primary sacred rite performed before Hashem, if a person bows down before an idol, he incurs capital liability (misas beis din) even if this is not the customary mode of worship for that specific deity. If he performed this willfully after formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah), he is liable to execution; if he did so willfully without prior warning, he incurs spiritual excision (kareis); and if committed unwittingly (b'shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin offering (korban chattas).

Similarly, if a person slaughters an animal sacrifice (shechitah), sprinkles its sacrificial blood (zerikah), burns its limbs or incense (haktarah), or pours a libation (nisu'ach): since these four acts constituted the foundational services performed to Hashem in the Sanctuary, one incurs capital liability for performing any of them to an idol, even if they are not its normal mode of worship.

A person is halachically obligated to surrender his life rather than commit such an idolatrous transgression (yehareig v'al ya'avor).

If a person's coins become scattered before an idol, or if a thorn lodges in his foot while standing before it, he must not bend down before the idol to retrieve them or remove the thorn, because he appears to be bowing down and prostrating himself before the idol; rather, he must turn his back to it or sit down aside.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can.

D. NOT TO SHOW HONOR TO A STRANGE GOD

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 29-2

As it is written, "do not serve them (Shemos 23:24, Parshas Mishpatim)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture warns: 'You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them' (Shemos 23:24). This commandment forbids performing any act of honor or reverence toward an idol, even if such homage is not its normal mode of worship. Consequently, it is strictly forbidden to embrace, kiss, sweep before, or show any gesture of reverence to an idol.

E. NOT TO WORSHIP A STRANGE GOD IN ITS OWN WAY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 12

As the Torah says, and you shall not serve them (Shemos 20:5, Parshas Yisro).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If the way people worship an idol is to do a shameful thing, ignoble thing, would that be considered idol worship even if it is not a respectable way to worship?
- What if you did a shameful thing in front of an idol that isn't worshiped that way?
- Are you allowed to kiss an idol, if it is not worshiped that way?
- If an idol is a water fountain, can one drink from it?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Even if an idol's customary worship is inherently degrading or repulsive — such as defecating before Ba'al Pe'or throwing a stone at a Merkulis shrine — one who performs that rite incurs capital liability. If he did so willfully without prior forewarning, he is punishable by spiritual excision (kareis); and if he acted unwittingly (b'shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin offering (korban chattas).

However, if someone defecates before Merkulis, he is completely exempt from biblical penalty, since that is not its customary mode of worship, and it constitutes an act of degradation rather than veneration.

If someone embraces or kisses an idol, sweeps or sprinkles water on the ground before it, or performs other gestures of homage toward any type of idol where such is not its indigenous worship, he violates a biblical prohibition; however, court-administered lashes are not inflicted, because this is an omnibus prohibition (lav she-b'chlalos) encompassing multiple disparate actions.

If water spouts emerge from sculptured images connected to an idolatrous shrine, a person must not place his mouth directly against them to drink, because he appears to be kissing an idol.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. This mitzvah is a precaution against serving idols.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Gavriel was in charge of distribution for a major Jewish publisher. One day he got an order from Eretz Yisrael for 50 of Rav Avigdor Miller's sefarim. The sefarim store needed them right away, so the owner asked for them to be shipped by air transport, which was much more expensive. Gavriel fulfilled the order and had several boxes loaded from his warehouse, and they were sent by plane. The air transport costs were about 150 dollars. A few days later, Gavriel got a message from the sefarim store owner with a picture of the contents of one of the boxes: "I ordered Rav Avigdor Miller's sefarim, why did you send me a box of books proving the ideas of Christianity?" Gavriel was shocked by the message and asked the owner to send him a picture of the outside of the box. Sure enough, the box with the Christian books had the label of the Jewish publisher on it. Gavriel told the sefarim store owner that he would look into how this happened and get back to him. After a bit of research, Gavriel figured it out. These books by Rav Avigdor Miller were printed in a print shop based in eastern Europe seven years earlier. The print shop was no longer in business. It turns out that the print house also made books for a Christian publishing company. When the books by Rav Avigdor Miller were ordered to be printed, one of the boxes was accidentally filled with the Christian books instead of Rav Avigdor Miller's books. The print house accidentally switched the Jewish publisher's order, but they were no longer in business to claim anything from them. The books were sitting in the warehouse of the Jewish publisher for the past seven years. Gavriel called up the seforim store owner and explained the situation. "Of course, we will replace the books. We will send them right away, and you should get them in about a week." The sefarim owner said, "but I need them immediately. Can you please send them by plane like last time? Also, what should I do with these Christian books?". Gavriel thought about both questions. Did he have an obligation to pay the extra 150 dollars for expedited shipping on the replacement order? On one hand, the owner paid for fast shipping for the seforim, and he got the wrong books. So maybe Gavriel should pay once again for the fast air shipping. But on the other hand, it was a mistake made by the printing house, not them. How was he supposed to know that the wrong books were put in the box? The box had the appropriate label on it, with Rav Avigdor Miller's sefer written on it. The print shop sealed the box shut, and there was no reason for them to open it before they sent it. Regarding the Christian books, what should he tell him? Should he sell them to a non-Jewish book store in Israel? Or was it wrong for a Jew to put books promoting the ideas of Christianity in circulation in Israel? Should the books be donated somewhere? Perhaps they should be thrown out? What do you think? Does Gavriel have to pay for shipping a new box of books by air? And can the seller in Eretz Yisrael sell the Christian books to a non-Jewish book store?

Answer: Regarding the question about the books, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered that the Jewish publisher should pay once again for the expedited air shipping. Regarding the issue of what the seforim store owner should do with the books, Rav Berkowitz said that they should be discarded and not sold to another bookstore.

— Source: Rav Tzvi Berkowitz / Table Talk Halachic Archive

F. NOT TO WORSHIP MOLECH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 29-53

As it says "do not pass your seed to molech" (Vayikra 18:21, Parshas Acharei Mos).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to pass one's offspring through fire in the cult of Molech, as Scripture warns: 'And you shall not give any of your seed to pass through the fire to Molech' (Vayikra 18:21).

10. To Eradicate Idols and Their Paraphernalia

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-63

As it says "you shall destroy their name from that place (Devarim 12:4, Parshas Re'eh)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive commandment to destroy and eradicate idolatry and all its paraphernalia, as Scripture commands: 'You shall utterly destroy their names from that place' (Devarim 12:3); this obligation remains in effect in all eras. If marauders capture the idols of idolaters, or if thieves sell an idol that has not undergone halachic nullification (bitul), a Jew must take care never to acquire it, but rather ensure that idolatrous objects are eliminated.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. This mitzvah is a precaution against serving idols.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Terach was a manufacturer and merchant of idols. Once Terach had to travel away, so he left his son Avraham in charge of the idol shop. Whenever a customer walked in to buy an idol, Avraham asked him: 'How old are you?' The man replied: 'Fifty or sixty years old.' Avraham exclaimed: 'Woe to a sixty-year-old man who wants to bow down to a statue that was carved yesterday!' Embarrassed, the customer walked out. Next, a woman came carrying a bowl of fine flour and said to Avraham: 'Here, offer this bowl of food before the idols!' Instead, Avraham picked up a heavy wooden club, smashed every single idol in the shop except for the biggest one, and placed the club right into the hands of the biggest idol! When his father Terach returned and saw his entire shop in pieces, he shouted: 'Who did this to all the idols?' Avraham answered with a straight face: 'I cannot hide the truth from you, Father! A woman brought a bowl of fine flour to feed them. One idol shouted: I am eating first! Another shouted: No, I am eating first! Whereupon the biggest idol stood up, grabbed the club, and smashed all the others to pieces!' Terach shouted: 'Why are you mocking me? Do these statues have any brains or life in them?' Avraham replied: 'Let your ears hear what your own mouth just spoke!' Terach handed Avraham over to King Nimrod, who ordered him cast into the fiery furnace — from which the Holy One, Blessed be He, rescued Avraham alive!

Bereishis Rabbah 38:13

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz's son-in-law, the gaon Rav Moshe Bernstein wrote: "In Kamenetz, while Reb Baruch Ber was in America, his family moved across the street from a priest's home. There was a crucifix on top of the priest's house, and no one noticed that one of Reb Baruch Ber's windows directly overlooked it. Years went by. One day, Reb Baruch Ber called me and said with joy, 'Today I read a story about the gaon R. Nosson Adler, and this story has saved my life. For years now I have suffered in silence, because I did not want to hurt those who secured this house for me. Now my suffering is over. "One snowy night, the Chasam Sofer had to travel a great distance in a horse-drawn wagon with his rav, R. Nosson Adler. In the middle of the night, without informing his passengers, the gentile driver hitched up an ox alongside the horse. When R. Nosson Adler realized what had happened, he jumped out of the wagon and began to dance with glee, saying, 'This is no small matter! It's the first time in my life I have been able to fulfill the verse, 'Do not plow using an ox and donkey together." Reb Baruch Ber concluded, "Therefore, I have even more reason to be happy. Daily, I face the possibility of looking out my window and gazing at that avodah zarah across the street. And every day when I refrain from looking at it, I fulfill the verse, 'And you must not be searching, following your heart and your eyes after which you tend to stray."

Reb Baruch Ber, by Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, published by Feldheim

❖ Rav Yaakov Galinsky told the following story: Let me share with you a story about Rav Yisrael Salanter during his final years, when he was living in Berlin. One day, Rav Naftali Ehrman came to visit Rav Yisrael at his small apartment and found him pacing back and forth. Rav Yisrael was visibly agitated. Immediately, Rav Naftali asked, "Rebbe, what happened? Why do you look so upset?" Rav Yisrael responded, "I'll tell you what just happened. Two Yidden who recently arrived from Kovno came to visit me. As you know, I established a Beis Medrash there where people could learn Mussar with hispa'alus -- intense emotional involvement. I founded the Mussar movement to create Batei Medrashim where people would repeat a pasuk or a teaching from Chazal over and over until it sank from the mind into the bones. But not everyone appreciates that approach. There are misnagdim -- opponents -- who don't support it. These two Yidden told me that in the Beis Medrash I had set up in Kovno, people are now trying to change the rules and structure of how I intended the learning to be conducted. And as they were telling me this I got angry and upset. They didn't notice it -- maybe it was just a fleeting thought -- but do you know what that means? Don't Chazal say, 'Kol hako'eis ke'ilu oved avodah zarah' -- 'Anyone who becomes angry is as if he worships idols'? Why? Because someone who truly believes that Hakadosh Baruch Hu runs the world, who understands that He controls every detail and that everything that happens is for the good, wouldn't become angry. Getting angry implies that you are, kaviyachol, upset with Hashem. Can you imagine? I had a fleeting thought of being upset with Hashem. If He made these two Yidden come and tell me what's happening -- that people are interfering with the Mussar movement -- then that is His will. Yes, I'll do all the hishtadlus I can to defend it and ensure that no harm comes to it. But to get angry? That's like being upset at Hashem. That reveals a lack of emunah and bitachon. Let's say I told you that I, Rav Yisrael Salanter, worshipped avodah zarah today for a few seconds. Wouldn't you understand why I'm so upset and agitated with myself? Well, that's exactly what happened. For a couple of seconds today, I was unhappy with Hakadosh Baruch Hu -- rachmana litzlan. That's avodah zarah. That's a lack of emunah and bitachon. And because of that, I have no rest. I'm deeply agitated. I'm very upset."

Table Talk, Edition 442 (Parshas Behar Bechukosai), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ A man once came to Volozhin collecting charity. All the townspeople gave him generous donations, except for Rav Chaim Volozhin. Everyone was surprised by his apparent stinginess, although of course no one said anything to him about it. Sometime later, it was found out that the visitor had really been collecting for Christian missionary activities to proselytize Jews. When this became known. The towns people could not contain their amazement. Now we know that the rav is gifted with ruach hakodesh," they told Rav Chaim. "Not in the slightest!" exclaimed Rav Chaim. "What happened was that I felt an overwhelming urge to give the man a donation. I realized that if he had been collecting for a legitimate cause

the yetzer hara would have spared no effort to make me feel stingy and made it more difficult for me. Therefore I realized that my desire to give must have been the work of the yetzer hara. Sometimes when we feel very excited to do what appears the right thing, we have to be able to discern if it is coming from a truly proper motivation.

The Rosh Yeshivah Speaks, By Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In 1991, little Misha Turovskiy sat in his second-grade class in a Moscow private school. This was during the days of Perestroika, when the Soviet Union was entering a new period of religious awakening. The second-grade teacher decided to introduce prayer to her class. She called for the children's attention, instructing them to remain in their seats and repeat after her as she recited her prayers aloud. Little Misha sat in his seat and did not repeat after the teacher. The teacher called out, "Misha, stand up!" Little Misha stood up, quite embarrassed. "Why are you not reciting the prayers?" she asked. Little Misha answered confidently, "I am a Jew, and we do not pray in this way." The teacher then told him to pray in the Jewish way. Misha told her that he did not know how Jews pray. Later that day, when Misha came home, he asked his mother, "How do we pray?" His mother had no answer, but she knew that if her child was asking such a basic question, she must find the answer. That Sunday, Margarita Turovskiy and her second grader found their way to the new Sunday Hebrew School that had recently opened in Moscow. Together, mother and son began their journey home. There is more to this story, which will add much meaning and perhaps serve as a lesson to us all. Fifty-one years before this story, in 1942, 19-year-old Alexander Josef Katz, the father of Margarita, was on the front lines fighting the Nazis for the Soviet Union. His commanding officer was creating documentation for Alexander and asked him where he was from. "Ukraine, sir," Alexander replied. "Okay, I will write that you are Ukrainian," said the officer. "No, officer, I am a Jew," Alexander insisted. "That's okay, I will write Ukrainian for your nationality," the officer responded. (To have documentation that reflected your nationality as Jew meant you would carry your shame with you every time you showed your papers. For this reason, many people grabbed the opportunity to have Russian or Ukrainian as their nationality instead of Jew.) "Officer, I am a Jew," Alexander repeated. His papers were processed, and Alexander Josef Katz remained a Jew. He built a family that continues being Jewish 80 years later on a different continent.

Table Talk, Edition 398 (Parshas Balak), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Friends with the Archbishop of Mainz, Rabbi Amnon was pressured to convert to Catholicism. As a delaying tactic, he requested three days to consider the offer; immediately after, he regretted intensely giving even the pretense that he could possibly accept a foreign religion. After spending the three days in prayer, he refused to come to the bishop as promised, and, when he was brought to the bishop's palace, he begged that his tongue be cut out to atone for his sins. Instead, the bishop ordered his hands and legs amputated — limb by limb — as punishment for not obeying his word to return after three days and for refusing to convert. At each amputation, Rabbi Amnon was again given the opportunity to convert, which he refused. This event occurred shortly before Rosh Hashanah. On that holiday, as he lay dying, Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried into the synagogue, where he recited the original composition of Unetanneh Tokef with his last breath. Three days later, he appeared in a dream to Rabbi Kalonymus Ben-Meshullam (died 1096), one of the great scholars of Mainz, and begged him to record the prayer and to see that it was included in the text of the High Holiday services. This is how Unetanneh Tokef became a part of the Tefilos of the Yamim Noraim.

Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology

A. TO MOCK IDOLATRY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-64

As it says "you shall destroy their name from that place (Devarim 12:4, Parshas Re'eh)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What effect does this have?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Included within the commandment to eradicate the name of idolatry is the obligation to employ derogatory and contemptuous terms when referring to idols. Thus Scripture consistently designates idolatry with degrading terms such as 'abominations' and 'carcasses of dung,' stating: 'And you saw their abominations and their detestable idols' (Devarim 29:16), and: 'The abomination of the children of Ammon' (Melachim I 11:5). Our Sages taught that all mockery is forbidden except mockery directed at idolatry (Megillah 25b), for whoever heaps disgrace upon idolatry confers honor upon his Creator.

B. NOT TO PERSUADE OTHERS TO WORSHIP STRANGE GODS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 23

As the Torah says, If your brother... entices you secretly, saying "Let us go and serve other gods". Then all Israel shall hear and shall fear, and shall never again do any such wickedness as this (Devarim 13:7, Parshas Re'eh)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Would one be liable for this prohibition even if he himself did not worship the idol?
- What if the person being enticed never actually worship the idol?
- Would this person need a warning before becoming liable for this capital punishment?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If an individual entices another Jew to engage in idolatry, whether phrasing the enticement in the singular ('Go and worship') or in the plural ('Let us go and worship'), he is liable to capital punishment by stoning, even if neither the enticer nor the enticed person ultimately worshiped an idol, but solely because he urged him to serve it.

An enticer (meisis) does not require formal halachic forewarning (hasra'ah) to incur capital liability by the court.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can.

C. NOT TO LISTEN TO THE PERSUADER

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 23-1

As it is written "do not listen to him" (Devarim 13:9, Parshas Re'eh)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to yield or listen to an enticer (meisis), as Scripture commands: 'You shall not consent to him, nor listen to him' (Devarim 13:9).

D. NOT TO PERSUADE A CITY TO WORSHIP STRANGE GODS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 14

As the Torah says, neither let it be heard out of mouth (Shemos 23:13, Parshas Mishpatim)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If someone incites an individual to worship an idol, he is termed an enticer (meisis). If he leads a multitude or an entire city astray into idolatry, he is termed a subverter (madiach); he incurs capital punishment by stoning, even if he never worshiped the idol himself, provided he successfully persuaded the community until they turned to worship it.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can.

PRECAUTIONS FROM IDOLATRY: GUARDRAILS & FENCES

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to developing precautions that will help to avoid idolatry and other forms of false worship. Avoiding false worship is one the foundations of building a relationship with Hashem, that helps us perfect our character in order to come close to Him.

E. NOT TO EVEN THINK ABOUT STRANGE GODS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 16

As the Torah says, Do not turn to idols (Vayikra 19:4, Parshas Kedoshim)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to look an idol?
- To talk about an idol worship?
- To think about it?
- To read their literature?
- To ask them about it?
- Why not?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is strictly forbidden to turn one's attention toward idols through speech, contemplation, or even by gazing intently upon them (Vayikra 19:4).

It is likewise forbidden to read the theological treatises of idolaters or inquire of them concerning their rituals and modes of worship, for such inquiries cause a person to focus his mind upon idolatrous concepts and validate their falsehood.

Whoever turns his attention toward idolatry in a manner accompanied by a concrete physical action violates this negative commandment and is liable to rabbinical admonition and court-administered lashes.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Regarding the verse 'There is none else beside Him' (Ein od milvado, Devarim 4:35), Rabbi Chanina taught: 'Not even sorcery has any independent power!' Once a certain sorceress was trying to scoop up earth from beneath Rabbi Chanina's footsteps to cast a spell against him. Rabbi Chanina looked at her and said calmly: 'Go ahead and take it! Your sorcery will not succeed at all, for it is written: There is none else beside Him!' The Gemara asks: Did not Rabbi Yochanan say that sorcery is called keshafim because it appears to contend with the Heavenly retinue? Rather, Rabbi Chanina was different because his abundant merit and complete trust in Hashem's unity rendered all sorcery powerless.

Chullin 7b

F. NOT TO EVEN LOOK AT STRANGE GODS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 22-3

As it says, "do not turn towards idols" (Vayikra 19:4 Parshas Kedoshim)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to gaze upon idols or their decorative forms, as this is subsumed under the biblical prohibition: 'Do not turn toward idols' (Vayikra 19:4).

G. NOT TO EVEN SAY THAT YOU WILL DO IDOLATRY

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-21

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must never open his mouth to the Satan by uttering sinful or ominous words (Berachos 19a). When the prophet stated, 'We were almost like Sodom, we were similar to Amorah,' Scripture immediately responded: 'Hear the word of Hashem, you rulers of Sodom' (Yeshayahu 1:9–10). Similarly, although King Yehu declared deceitfully that he intended to worship the Ba'al merely as a ruse to eliminate its priests, he ultimately succumbed to idolatry himself because he gave voice to the transgression (Melachim II 10:18–31; Sanhedrin 102a).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Jews for Yoshka is a group that tries to convince Jews to become Christians. They use deceptive tactics, telling unsuspecting Jews that one can be both Jewish and Christian at the same time. One day a group of J for J missionaries set up a booth near the Dead Sea. They were all very warm and friendly people. They had coolers of ice cold water bottles at their table. When the hot Jewish swimmers would pass by their table they would offer them an ice cold bottle of water, for free. They would also try to engage the people with friendly talk and occasionally they gave them some of their literature and contact info. Yehuda finished swimming at the Dead Sea and he was hot and extremely thirsty. He eyed the water at the J for J table with great interest. They were giving out the water for free. Yehuda knew that he shouldn't take their literature and not even engage the missionaries with conversation, but would it be ok to

take a cold bottle of water? On one hand, there was nothing wrong with taking water from a non Jew. But on the other hand perhaps if he took the water, others might take the water as well, and get ensnared in the missionary propaganda. What do you think? Can Yehuda take the very tempting, ice cold bottle of water?

Answer: Regarding the question of the water bottles, Rav Zilberstein answered that the water can't be taken, because it will create goodwill towards the ones offering it.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 366 (Table Talk Edition #149 (Parshas Nitzavim))

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rav Yehudah recounted the story of the woman (Miriam bat Tanchum / Chana) and her seven sons. They brought each son before Caesar and ordered him to bow to the idol; each boy quoted a verse from the Torah proclaiming the oneness of God—'I am the Lord your God'; 'You shall have no other gods before Me'; 'Whoever sacrifices to any god save to the Lord alone shall be utterly destroyed'; 'You shall not bow down to any other god'; 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One'; 'Know this day and lay it to your heart that the Lord He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else'—and gave his life in sanctification of God's Name. When the youngest child was brought, Caesar offered to drop his signet ring on the ground so the boy could merely bend down to pick it up and appear to have obeyed. The child replied: 'Woe to you, Caesar! If you fear the judgment of flesh-and-blood onlookers so much, how much more must I fear the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He!' Before he was led away, his mother embraced him and said: 'My son, go to Abraham your father and tell him: Thus says my mother—Do not boast! You bound one altar, and I bound seven altars!'

Gittin 57b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Gifter recognized and appreciated people who were seekers of truth. Avi was a lifeguard in Camp Kol Rinah in the summer of 1962. He was having a fantastic summer, one of great fun, but more importantly, great spiritual growth. The director of the camp, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Greenwald, suggested to him that he attend Yeshivas Telz. Avi was hesitant at first; he knew virtually nothing about the yeshivah. In addition, the school he currently attended was light years away from Telz in its Torah outlook. Nevertheless, after much thought, he decided to write a letter to the yeshivah to explain why he wanted to go there and why he should be accepted. Avi wrote a 12-page manifesto and sent it off to the yeshivah. A few days later, Avi was lifeguarding at the pool when the phone rang in the camp office. He was summoned to the office, and was told that Rav Gifter was on the phone! Rav Gifter explained that he appreciated Avi's letter, but there were no beds available in the Yeshivah. Avi was terribly disappointed; he begged that he at least be granted an interview. After more discussion, Avi offered a bold proposal: "What if I were to sleep on the roof of the yeshivah?" Rav Gifter was astounded that a young man had such a strong desire to come to yeshivah that he was willing to sleep on the roof. Rav Gifter responded that Avi's strong desire had earned him the chance to take an entrance examination (bechina). When he arrived at the yeshivah, Rav Gifter assigned him to prepare a page of Gemara. Even though Avi was very bright, he had never learned Gemara in depth. Fortunately, Rav Gifter assigned a talmid to learn with him and help him prepare. Avi performed admirably on the examination, and was accepted to the yeshivah, to Rav Pesach Stein's shiur. There was only one problem. Rav Pesach gave his shiur in Yiddish and Avi didn't speak Yiddish, not one word of it. Determined to overcome that obstacle, Avi made himself a makeshift dictionary in his Gemara, and jotted down every new Yiddish word he heard. He worked and toiled and reviewed. And reviewed. And reviewed. In fact, nearly 50 years later, when he told this story to this

author, he cried as he recalled the effort and review he had put into mastering his rebbi's shiur. Avi would eventually outgrow his nickname and become Avrohom Chaim — Rav Avrohom Chaim Feuer — a noted talmid chacham, rav author, and disseminator of Torah... and the son-in-law of Rav Gifter.

Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Yisrael Belsky Zt"l, the Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Veda'as offered the following parable as a source of chizuk for dealing with life's challenges: During World War II, as the Allies planned their attack on the Japanese mainland, they encountered a problem. The Japanese had taken up positions on many Pacific islands that served as a barrier to any possible invasion. One island in particular, Okinawa, seemed very heavily fortified. Japan could not be invaded unless that island was first conquered. But to conquer it, it would be necessary for volunteers to come forward for what seemed a suicide mission. A group volunteered and made their way to the island for what seemed their certain death. However, upon reaching the island they discovered that many of the tanks, planes and guns that they had seen from afar were in fact dummy tanks, made of wood, straw, or carved lava rock, that were exact replicas of heavy weaponry. Said Rav Belsky: When one faces difficult times and the challenges seem insurmountable, he should first determine the correct approach to the problem and place his full trust in Hashem. Then, he may be pleasantly surprised to discover that the challenges were not insurmountable, and in fact, can be dealt with and overcome.

From Rav Belsky, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

11. Not to Mention the Name of Strange Deities

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 13

As the Torah says, and make no mention of the name of other gods (Shemos 23:13, Parshas Mishpatim).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Are you allowed to mention the name of an idol?
- Can you swear in the name of a false god?
- Can you make a heathen swear in the name of his god?
- Can you tell a person to meet you near a certain idol?
- Can you mention the names of the idols mentioned in the Torah?
- Can you make someone swear in the name of one of the idols mentioned in the Torah?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

A person must not make a vow or swear an oath in the name of an idol, as Scripture warns: 'And the name of other gods you shall not mention' (Shemos 23:13).

Included within this prohibition is the strict ban against causing an idolater to swear by his deity (lo yishama al picha), meaning one must not enter into a business partnership or litigation that would compel him to take an oath in the name of his idol.

Even casually mentioning an idol's name outside the context of an oath is strictly forbidden; for example, one must not say to a companion: 'Meet me beside the temple of that specific idol,' or use its name as a landmark.

However, regarding idolatrous deities explicitly recorded in the sacred text of the Torah or Tanach — such as Pe'or, Bel, Nevo, and Molech — it is permissible to mention their names in study. Nevertheless, it remains entirely forbidden to cause others to vow or swear in their names.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

There have been thousands of pagan Gods throughout history that have become forgotten because of misuse. If we say the name of an avodah zara, we continue to perpetuate its memory and awareness.

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss how the outcome of never mentioning the name of an idol, is that eventually, over history, that idol is totally forgotten about, and conversely, the more it is spoken about the more its memory and prestige increases.
- Not to cause others to say it (Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 24-41

As it says, "it shall be not heard by your mouth" (Shemos 23:13, Parshas Mishpatim)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture concludes the verse: "Nor shall it be heard upon your mouth" (Shemos 23:13). Chazal teach that this prohibits causing others to utter the name of an idol. Consequently, it is forbidden to enter into a business partnership with an idolater, lest a financial dispute arise requiring an oath, thereby causing him to swear by the name of his idol, or compelling you to swear to him. The phrase "upon your mouth" thus signifies: do not cause the name of idolatry to be invoked through your instigation.

A. NOT TO BENEFIT FROM SOMETHING THAT WAS OFFERED AS AN OFFERING TO A STRANGE GOD

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 15

As the Torah says, Take heed to yourself, lest you make covenant with the inhabitants of the land... and one call you, and you will eat of his sacrifice (Shemos 34:12, Parshas Ki Sisa)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If wine was offered to an idol, can one drink it?
- Can it be sold?
- Can one drink wine simply made by a non-Jew?
- How about wine that is owned by a Jew, and touched by a non-Jew?
- Can one eat at a non-Jewish wedding. What if the food is kosher? What if the Jew brings his own food?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Included in this biblical prohibition is wine poured as a libation to an idol (yayin nesech). It is strictly forbidden to derive any benefit whatsoever from an idolatrous offering or libation wine (assur b'hana'ah). If a person intentionally consumes even the slightest amount of an offering dedicated to an idol or drinks from libation wine, he violates this negative commandment.

By rabbinic enactment, deriving any benefit from the standard, unspecified wine of idolaters (stam yeinam) is likewise strictly forbidden. If one willfully drinks a revi'is (a halachic quarter-log) of such wine, he incurs rabbinic lashes for disobedience (makas mardus).

If an idolater deliberately touches the kosher wine of a Jew, it is rendered forbidden for all use and benefit (assur b'hana'ah).

It is furthermore forbidden by rabbinic law to eat at a feast hosted by an idolater, such as a wedding banquet for his son or daughter, in their company. Even if the Jew eats his own kosher food and his own servant stands and attends to him, dining at their celebration remains strictly forbidden.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 86)

If we benefit from things that were offered to avodah zara we perpetuate its memory. When we destroy it, we help to destroy its memory.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A man once stood at the corner of a busy city intersection waving his arms to direct the passing cars, utterly convinced that if not for his waving, traffic would grind to a halt. In truth, says Rabbi Yechiel Spero, that is a parable for a person who imagines that his own efforts run the world without recognizing Hashem's guiding hand.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

B. NOT TO SMELL THE INCENSE OF IDOLATRY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 28-2

As it says "nothing of the forbidden shall be attached to you" (Devarim 20:13, Parshas Shoftim).

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

It is strictly forbidden to smell the incense offered to an idol, as Scripture warns: "And nothing of the forbidden property shall cling to your hand" (Devarim 13:18). Consequently, one must never recite a blessing over such scents, since deriving any fragrance or benefit from them is entirely prohibited (assur b'hana'ah).

C. NOT TO BENEFIT FROM THE GOLD AND SILVER OF AN IDOL

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 17

As the Torah says, you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it for yourself (Devarim 7:25, Parshas Va'eschanan).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR:

As the Torah commands: "You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is upon them and take it for yourself" (Devarim 7:25). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

The Talmud states that in post-Temple times, items consecrated to the Temple or articles used for idolatry must be cast into the Dead Sea (Yam HaMelach) to ensure they are forever destroyed and lost. Inspired by this history, modern scuba divers explored the Dead Sea bed and recovered ancient gold vessels that had rested submerged for centuries. May these recovered gold vessels be used, melted down, or sold, or do they remain permanently forbidden from all benefit?

Answer: Analyzing the Gemara in Yoma (66a), Pesachim (28a), and Avodah Zarah (43b) — which teach that consecrated items (hekdesh) and objects of idolatry (avodah zarah) must be cast into the Dead Sea (Yam HaMelach) for permanent destruction — Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that gold vessels recovered by scuba divers from the floor of the Dead Sea remain subject to a serious prohibition of hekdesh or avodah zarah (which never becomes nullified even after thousands of

years) and therefore may not be used for personal benefit.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 413

12. Not to Derive Benefit from Idols

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 18

As the Torah says, and you shall not bring an abomination into your house (Devarim 7:26, Parshas Va'eschanan); and it says further, and nothing of the banned, proscribed matter shall cling to your hand (Devarim 13:18, Parshas Re'eh).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can one use hair cut as part of idol worship to make a wig?
- If a cow was worshiped as a god, can it be eaten?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If a person derives benefit from an idol or its embellishments, he violates these prohibitions. However, any object of worship that was not fashioned or altered by human hands — such as a natural mountain, a tree planted originally for its fruit rather than for pagan worship, or a domestic animal that was not subjected to any idolatrous act — is permissible for use and benefit; nevertheless, any decorative ornaments or offerings placed upon them are strictly forbidden to derive benefit from.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A residential house was designed from above in the structural shape of a large cross. Is an observant Jew permitted to live in it?

Answer: Based on the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 142:14) and Rema (141:1), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if an apartment building or house was designed by an architect in a cross layout purely for structural or aesthetic geometry (l'shem noy) — to maximize window exposure and airflow — and not as an object of religious worship, it is permitted according to the letter of the law to live in it, though if easily feasible it is preferable to add a small porch or awning that alters the exterior silhouette.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Avodah Zarah, p. 321

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred in Sidon involving a tree that pagans were worshipping, and there was a heap of stones beneath it. Rabbi Shimon said to the townspeople: 'Examine this heap of stones!' They examined the heap and discovered an idol hidden inside it. Rabbi Shimon said to them: 'Since it is the hidden idol inside the stone heap that they are worshipping and not the living tree itself, remove the heap and destroy the idol, and the tree itself is permitted to you!'

Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah 3:10 (and Mishnah Avodah Zarah 3:7)

A. NOT TO PROSTRATE YOURSELF ON A STONE, OR STONE FLOOR OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 161

As the Torah says, neither shall you place any paving stone in your land, to bow down on it (Vayikra 26:1, Parshas Behar)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the meaning of bowing?
- Can one bow without spreading the hands and feet?
- If one bows without spreading the hands and feet to idolatry, are they liable?
- Can we bow down on the ground in a synagogue?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If someone bows down upon a stone surface, fully prostrating with outstretched hands and feet (pissuk yadayim v'raglayim) even in worship to Hashem, he violates this biblical negative commandment (even maskis).

If he bowed down upon a stone floor without extending his hands and feet, he has violated a rabbinic decree and is subject to rabbinic lashes for disobedience (makas mardus).

If he bowed down upon a stone floor as an act of idolatrous worship, whether with full prostration or without extending his limbs, he is liable for a capital offense.

In a synagogue paved with stone, it is therefore necessary to spread mats, fabric, straw, or grass upon the floor to serve as an interposition before kneeling and prostrating [such as during the Aleinu and Avodah services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur].

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 349)

If you bow to Hashem on top of a stone, it may appear as if you are worshiping the stone.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH — CHOREV (CHAPTER 118)

We are only to bow to Hashem like that in the Beis Hamikdash, when we are united as a nation. Bowing to Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash symbolizes dedicating our lives to the Torah.

B. NOT TO MAKE A MONUMENT TO EVEN WORSHIP HASHEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 162

As the Torah says, Neither shall you set yourself up a pillar (Devarim 16:22, Parshas Shoftim).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR:

The term "pillar" (matzeivah) denotes a single-stone monument or monolithic structure around which worshipers would assemble. Even when intended for the worship of Hashem, constructing such a pillar is strictly forbidden, because it became an established practice of idolatrous nations. If someone erects a matzeivah anywhere, even for the exclusive purpose of serving Hashem, he violates this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RASHI

This used to be beloved in the time of the Avos, but it is now forbidden because this is a practice of idolatry.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 493)

Even if we worship Hashem in this way, because it is a practice of idolaters in their pagan worship, we may think about idolatry when we worship Hashem.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

A matzeva is a single stone erected for the glory of God. The stone, which was made entirely by Hashem, symbolizes being close to Hashem because what God has given to us. Before the giving of the Torah, that was how our ancestors worshipped Hashem. But after the giving of the Torah, it is not enough to remember what Hashem has done (as symbolized by a whole stone) now we have to build a mizbeach, which is a manmade structure of stone upon stone. That symbolizes the work of perfecting and building ourselves that we have to do.

C. NOT TO LISTEN TO THE PROPHET OF A STRANGE GOD

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 22

As the Torah says, You shall not listen to the words of that prophet (Devarim 13:4, Parshas Re'eh).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If a man says a prophecy in the name of a false god, can you talk to him about it?
- Can you ask him for a miracle to prove his authenticity?
- If he does perform miracles, can we pay attention to him?
- Can you believe his prophecy?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

One must not engage in theological debate or extended discussion with a false prophet who advocates idolatry.

One must never ask him to produce a validating sign or miraculous wonder.

Even if he performs an astonishing sign or wonder, one must pay no attention to him whatsoever.

Whoever entertains the thought that his sign might genuinely be true and from God violates this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition

D. NEVER BE INTIMIDATED BY A FALSE PROPHET

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-23

E. NOT TO FEAR OR BE DETERRED BY A FALSE PROPHET

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to fear or be intimidated by the claims and threats of a false prophet, as Scripture commands: "In presumption has the prophet spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him" (Devarim 18:22). This injunction extends in all eras to confronting any non-Jewish adversaries or polemicists who seek to frighten Jews or undermine our steadfast faith in Hashem.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (3:5)

The Superiority Of The Nevuah Of Moshe Over Other Nevuos. There are two levels of nevuah, 1. Everybody else, 2. Moshe. This is openly addressed in the Torah.

Other neviim get the nevuah by Hashem putting the image in their mind through a dream

Nonetheless the navi doesn't have to be sleeping. It means that he is not in charge of his senses as if he is sleeping. This can happen both when he is awake and when he is sleeping. You only have a nevuah when you lose your senses. This loss of senses can take a very short moment.

The navi doesn't see the image like he sees a friend. It is rather through many lenses. Also the lenses are not always clear. Nevertheless it is always clear that Hashem is being revealed to them. Different neviim have different clarity of lenses.

Additionally the message is given to them through meshalim. It is not explicit.

That was the other neviim. However Moshe's nevuah was superior in that:

He stayed in his regular state. He didn't have to leave his sense to a state of Chalom

He had one clear lens

He didn't get mashalim

Nevertheless he still needed one lens because it's impossible to see Hashem directly

Because of all of these maalos, Moshe had the greatest haskala possible

(d) Other nevi'im can't get the nevuah at any moment rather only when Hashem is mashpia. However Moshe could get nevuah whenever he wanted

(e) Also other neviim can only know of the details that Hashem reveals to them, but Moshe had revelation of everything with its details.

Although Moshe saw Hashem's temuna (A reflection) Moshe and the rest of the neviim shared that just as they understood that they saw an image of Hashem's kavod, and understood what that kavod meant, and how it happened, and that they got great haskala. Similarly they understood that they never saw Hashem himself and that Hashem has no tziur at all and what they saw was just for the perception of the Navi

The same with all the Jews at Sinai. They knew that Hashem had no tziur but got a perception of Hashem through an aspaklaria (lens)

F. NOT TO SAY A PROPHECY IN THE NAME OF A STRANGE GOD

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 27

As the Torah says, and make no mention of the name of other gods (Shemos 23:13, Parshas Mishpatim)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is he liable for this if he says a true halachah in the name of a false god?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

One who prophesies in the name of an idol incurs the court-administered death penalty. He is liable even if the ruling he delivered was entirely consistent with authentic halachah — accurately declaring the ritually contaminated to be defiled (tamei) and the pure to be clean (tahor) — since he attributed his proclamation to the authority of an idol.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of life is to perfect our character so that we can come close to Hashem. If we worship a false g-d we miss the very purpose of life. All of the mitzvos in this category ensure that we are devoting our lives to serving the one true Hashem, by becoming as G-dlike as we can. Because idolatry pushes us away from the very purpose of life, which is to perfect our character, the Torah created safeguards that prevent us from even coming close to this prohibition

HONOR TO THE TORAH & HOLY OBJECTS

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to developing a respect for Torah and the mitzvah lifestyle that it teaches. This respect is also one of the foundations of the mitzvah system which helps us to perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

13. To Honor the Torah

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 18-7

A. TO HONOR THE PRESENCE OF A TORAH SAGE (ZAKEN)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive mitzvah to stand in reverence before a Sefer Torah. Chazal derived this obligation through an a fortiori argument (kal vachomer): if the Torah commands us to rise before those who study its teachings, as Scripture states, "You shall rise before the aged and honor the face of the elder" (Vayikra 19:32) — which Chazal interpret as a Torah scholar (zeh she-kanah chochmah) — then we are all the more certainly obligated to rise before the Sefer Torah itself.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:2)

This hashpa'ah of learning Torah only comes with the following conditions. Yirah, Tikun Hamaseh.

Yirah: this hashpa is not a natural thing. Without the hashpah you will simply get the knowledge that comes with learning it, but you won't get the shleimus from the hashpa. However when you learn with reverence, yirah, then when you learn you get this hashpah for you and for the entire universe. If this condition is missing then you will get no hashpa, and it will be just like reading a book, which of course doesn't give a hashpa. Additionally, learning without yirah is an aveirah. The greater the yirah and honor you have for the learning the greater will the hashpah be.

Tikun Hamaseh means that aveiros block the hashpa from properly coming in

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of our lives, the reason why we were brought to this world is to perfect our character, so that we can achieve G-dliness and come close to Hashem. We do all of this by means of the mitzvos of the Torah. We give honor to the Torah to remind us that Torah matters rise above all else, because it is the very purpose of our lives. This will remind us to make Torah and mitzvos a priority in our lives so that we can become Godly.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A young man owned a large wooden bookcase that served exclusively to house his sefarim for ten years. Following his marriage, he relocated his sefarim to his new home. His mother wished to repurpose the empty bookcase in her dining room to display and store decorative china dinner plates. Is she halachically permitted to use the bookcase for tableware, or does converting a bookcase that served holy sefarim into secular storage constitute an unlawful degradation of sacred property (tashmish kedushah)?

Answer: Based on the Mishnah Berurah (154:9), since printed sefarim have their own bindings and covers, a wooden bookcase that held them has the status of a tashmish d'tashmish (an accessory of an accessory) rather than a primary sacred vessel (tashmish kedushah). Therefore, once the sefarim have been moved to a new bookcase, it is permitted to repurpose the shelves for respectable household tableware, though citing the Imrei Yosher (Siman 45) it is a praiseworthy stringency to redeem the bookcase for a nominal coin given to purchase sefarim.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 170

A secular family owned a beloved dog named Igor. One day, the dog darted into the street and was struck by a car driven by a local community Rabbi. Rushing out in distress, the Rabbi immediately apologized, helped the family tend to the injured animal, and showed extraordinary warmth, sensitivity, and genuine care. Deeply moved by the Rabbi's sterling character and midos tovos, the family began attending shiurim with the Rabbi, which eventually sparked a profound spiritual transformation: the entire family became fully observant ba'alei teshuvah. Years later, blessed with considerable financial success, the family generously funded the construction of a beautiful new Beis Midrash for the community. Out of heartfelt gratitude to the Divine Providence that guided them to Torah through that fateful incident, the donor requested to dedicate the building under the name "Beis Igor," in memory of the pet that catalyzed their return to Yiddishkeit. The community leadership wondered: While gratitude (hakaras hatov) is paramount, is naming a sacred sanctuary for Torah and tefillah after an animal a degradation to the dignity of the Beis Midrash (kavod Beis HaKnesses)? What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that it is permitted to dedicate the sanctuary as "Beis Igor" if honoring the donor's request will encourage the family to continue growing in their commitment to Yiddishkeit and Torah observance. While naming a sacred Beis Midrash after a canine is ordinarily inappropriate due to kavod Beis HaKnesses, here the name does not honor an animal for its own sake, but rather serves as a living testimony to the Hashgachah Pratis (Divine Providence) that rescued a Jewish family and brought them back under the wings of the Shechinah. In the realm of kiruv and spiritual growth, fostering the family's eternal connection to Torah and encouraging their ongoing mitzvah observance overrides the technical reservation regarding the name. (Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 164)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 164

During the war, the Nazis defaced many of the synagogues in Lithuania. One looter took the ornate curtain (paroches) in front of the Holy Ark in the Kovno Ghetto shul and used it as a bed sheet. Following the liberation of the ghetto, the survivors gathered back into the synagogue and retrieved the sacred curtain from the looter. They approached Rabbi Ephraim Oshry with an agonizing question: Is it permissible to wash, sanctify, and restore this curtain to its former holy position adorning the Aron Kodesh, or does its debasement by an oppressor as a bed sheet permanently disqualify it from serving before the sacred Torah scrolls?

Answer: Rav Ephraim Oshry ruled (citing Shu"t Machaneh Chaim, Vol. 1, Siman 135) that it was completely permissible—and a mitzvah—to retrieve the stolen paroches from the gentile looter, launder it, and restore it to its holy place adorning the Aron Kodesh in the Hausman Kloiz synagogue of liberated Kovno. An act of theft and profane use by a gentile oppressor does not strip a sacred Jewish ritual object of its original sanctity ('lo yatza mi-kedushaso ha-rishonah she-haysah lo'), and returning the curtain to the Holy Ark reclaims and elevates its honor.

— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 2, Siman 23

A synagogue commissioned a new Aron Kodesh but only paid half of the agreed invoice, continuously delaying the remaining balance. One night, the frustrated carpenter entered the shul and removed the doors of the Aron Kodesh, announcing that he would not return them until full payment was rendered. Is such repossession halachically permitted, or does it constitute a desecration (bizayon) to the sanctity of the Torah?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein notes that while an unpaid artisan who has not yet transferred ownership of his craft does not technically violate the prohibition of demolishing a synagogue ('lo sa'asun ken') when reclaiming unpaid doors, a leading Posek of the generation ruled that it is nevertheless forbidden to remove the doors of an Aron Kodesh and leave the Sifrei Torah exposed in disgrace (bizayon ha-kodesh); instead, the carpenter must summon Chaim to Beis Din to compel immediate payment.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bechoros, p. 318

In a yeshivah for ba'alei teshuvah, students who became observant donated their former earrings and jewelry to be melted down into a beautiful crown for the Sefer Torah. After the crown was completed, one student discovered with horror that the gold jewelry he had donated years earlier had actually been stolen from an acquaintance. May the yeshivah retain and use the crown on the Sefer Torah, or does stolen property defile an adornment for the Torah?

Answer: Based on the Gemara in Beitzah (29a) and Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 366:2), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that once the jewelry was melted down into a new form (shinui ma'aseh) as a Torah crown, the crown does not need to be melted down; instead, to rectify the unreturned stolen pieces whose original owners are unknown, the penitent students (or donors on their behalf) should contribute the monetary value of those pieces to public communal needs (tzorchei rabim).

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Peah–Demai–Kilayim, p. 135

Ari enjoyed going to shul. But he also greatly enjoyed the social aspects of shul. Very often, Ari would talk to his friends throughout the prayer service. Behind Ari sat a man named Shimshon. Shimshon tried asking Ari to stop talking but Ari often rudely dismissed him. Ari was quite arrogant about it and he wasn't open to any reproof from his neighbor Shimshon. One Shabbos, while Ari was still talking to his friends during the Torah reading, Ari was called up to the Torah for Chamishi, the fifth Aliyah. However, he was so engrossed in this conversation that he didn't hear the gabai call his name. Shimshon realized that he had an opportunity to perhaps teach Ari to never talk during the Torah reading again. Shimshon leaned over and told Ari, "They just called you up for Hagbah". The shul was full, and between the men and women there were close to 500 people in the shul. Ari confidently strutted up to the bima as everyone watched. He went over to the Torah and picked it up as wide as he could, and loudly said "zos hatorah asher sam moshe". Ari was quite impressed with himself, and was proud of the smooth and wide hagbah that he did. But as soon as Ari picked up the Torah the whole synagogue opened up in an uproar "it's just chamishi!" In a flash, Ari realized what happened. With the whole entire shul of 500 people watching, he did hagbah and lifted up the Torah when really it was the middle of the Torah reading and he should have made an aliya, not done hagba. Ari realized that his error happened because he was distracted by talking during the Torah reading. He was extremely humbled by the experience.

He truly took it to heart and never again spoke during the Torah reading. Shimshon who caused this situation felt extremely conflicted afterward. On one hand, the embarrassment he caused to Ari stopped him from talking. But on the other hand, even if one is allowed to embarrass somebody to stop talking, are they allowed to go to this extent? Shimshon sent this question to Rav Zilberstein, asking if he did the right thing or the wrong thing. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the Hagbah, Rav Zilberstein wrote that an individual is not permitted to take the initiative to embarrass someone to that great extent without the express permission of a Beis Din.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Bereishis, p. 294 (Table Talk Edition 235)

During one of Israel's recent wars against its enemies, an IDF combat unit was deployed in a wilderness area. The troop consisted of more than 10 men. One particular Thursday morning, they were davening together as a minyan. They reached the point in the davening where the Torah was read. Initially, they thought they didn't have a Torah, so they planned to read from a chumash. However, one soldier surprised the group by revealing that he had a small Torah scroll in his duffel bag. He presented it, and it had immaculate lettering, in perfect condition, and with beautiful parchment. The group was thrilled to have the opportunity to read from an actual Sefer Torah. However, a dilemma arose regarding how to read from the Torah. There was no bima or shulchan to place the table on. One person suggested that they can place the Torah on a talis on the ground and read it. That idea was rejected by the minyan, feeling that it was not respectful. Others suggested standing and holding the Torah up while reading it. Most of the minyan said that they never saw the Torah being read while being held aloft. A third soldier offered a unique solution: "Place a tallis on my back, and I'll bend over. You can then read the Torah from there." Laughter erupted, with many thinking he was joking. But he asserted, "I'm serious. This demonstrates my profound respect and love for the Torah." Faced with a question about what would be most respectful in such a situation, they sought the advice of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein. They asked: In situations where they were in the field without a bima, which would be more respectful - to read the Torah while standing and holding it aloft, to read the Torah placing it on a tallis on the ground, or to place it on someone's back over a tallis? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about how to hold the Torah, Rav Zilberstein wrote that the most respectful option would be to put the Torah on the back of a person, on top of a tallis. Rav Zilberstein cites the Chida, who writes that there is a custom on Tisha B'Av to read the Torah on someone's back. So in this case, even not on Tisha B'Av, when there is no bimah available, this would be the most respectful option.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Vayikra, p. 402

Yoni, a rabbi from Eretz Yisrael, was hired by a congregation in Paris to be their rabbi. Yoni moved with his young family to this new congregation. It was a mixed congregation with varied levels of observance. On the first week of his job, a couple came to Rabbi Yoni with a problem; they were experiencing marital disharmony, problems with shalom bayis, and were constantly getting into arguments. One would say something hurtful, the other would lash back, and it would create a cycle of disharmony. They came to Rabbi Yoni for advice on how they could restore their shalom bayis. Rabbi Yoni recalled a teaching from the Talmud (Bava Basra 160b) which addresses how a Cohen gives a divorce. It was done with a Get Mekushar, a tied-up divorce document which has multiple folds and each fold was tied. The purpose of this was to create a pause between the desire to give the divorce and the actual delivery of it, and this would give the husband more time to reconsider. (This was only done for Kohanim who could not remarry their wives after they got divorced.) Rabbi Yoni turned to the couple and said, "I want to give you some advice based on the secrets of the Torah. Take this bottle of water. It is holy water that is blessed and has the power to restore shalom bayis. Whenever you get into an argument and want to say something harsh, that's fine. But first, pour from this bottle of water, fill a cup of

water, boil the water, and then drink the boiled water. After you drink the boiled water, say what you wanted to say. Then, the other person, whenever you want to respond, that's fine -- first fill up the water, boil the water, drink the entire cup, and then say what you wanted to say. Please try this for a month and then come back to me." The couple came back in a month and said, "We'd like to buy another one of your holy water bottles. It actually worked, and our arguments have really decreased. Rabbi Yoni said that it was free of charge. He gave them another bottle of this holy water, and sure enough, after a few months, the couple's marriage was restored, and they had an incredible renewed relationship. This couple shared their experience with other couples, and soon, other couples started coming to Yoni to buy his holy water. Yoni would say the same thing and give the water for free. Word quickly spread around the city that Yoni was a miracle worker, a Mekubal, a Kabbalist, who distributed this special holy water that could save marriages. While Yoni saved many marriages he became increasingly uncomfortable with this role. He knew it was a bit of a farce calling him a miracle worker; he was simply creating space between stimulus and response, a pause between the desire to be angry and the response. He knew he wasn't warranted in being called a miracle worker. There is a halachic teaching (Yerushalmi, Shevi'is 10:3) that if one knows only one Masechta (Tractate) and he is being honored for knowing two tractates, it's important for him to disclose that he knows only one. The reason for this is because he is benefiting from the honor of the Torah when he does not deserve it. So, Rabbi Yoni had the following question: Should he make an announcement that the water was not really special and had no holy powers, and that it was simply a psychological tool to create a space between stimulus and response? Or should he not do that because if he did, it might disrupt the shalom bayis in the homes, as people might feel they were tricked? Also, he was not purposely trying to benefit from the honor of the Torah as being known as a miracle worker. He was torn about what to do. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question of the water bottles, Rav Zilberstein answered that the water can't be taken, because it will create goodwill towards the ones offering it.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yevamos, p. 816 (Table Talk Edition 362)

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ One who hands a Sefer Torah to his fellow should hand it only with his right hand, and the one who receives it should receive it only with his right hand, for so was its giving at Mount Sinai, as it is written (Devarim 33:2): 'From His right hand went a fiery law for them.' One may not place a sacred scroll upon a chair and let it hang down while reading as people read ordinary documents, for we never treat sacred books with disrespect; rather, one holds it in his hands with awe and reads from it, and we never toss sacred books from place to place. Nor may a person sit upon a bed upon which a Sefer Torah is resting. It once happened that Rabbi Elazar inadvertently sat down upon a bed while a sacred scroll was resting upon it, and the instant he realized it, he leaped up like a man bitten by a snake! For it is written (Vayikra 19:30): 'You shall keep My Sabbaths and revere My Sanctuary—I am the Lord': it is not the Sanctuary itself that I fear, but the One Who commanded concerning it! A person is obligated to make beautiful tzitzis, beautiful mezuzos, and to write a beautiful Sefer Torah with fine ink, a fine reed pen, skilled scribes, and fine parchment, and to wrap it in fine silk, as it is written (Shemos 15:2): 'This is my God and I will beautify Him!'

Tractate Soferim 3:10–13

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A student at the Chevron Yeshivah in Yerushalayim maintained a daily learning session with the Rosh Yeshivah, Harav Simchah Zissel Broyde. They were deeply engrossed in some very complicated segments of tractate Eruvin and persevered to resolve a seemingly contradictory passage in the Mordechai. At midnight, the scheduled end of their daily shiur, they left

the study hall for home despite the unresolved passage, since their entire day was filled with various other shiurim. Our story took place during the initial phases of the yeshivah's relocation to its present quarters in the Givat Mordechai section of the city. The streets leading from the faculty housing to the beis medrash were not yet paved, and, aside from a select few, no one in the area possessed a telephone. The single phone to service the staff was the one located in the office of the yeshivah. "I retired to bed shortly after arriving home," the student recalls. "At about 1:30 a.m. my telephone rang. As one of the few people in the neighborhood to have a phone at home, I ran to answer it, expecting some medical emergency involving a neighbor. Realizing that the Rosh Yeshivah was on the other end of the line actually frightened me even more, knowing that neither he nor any of his neighbors possessed a phone, and that he must have walked the lengthy unpaved distance to the yeshivah office to place the call at that hour. "Baruch Hashem, my worries persisted for just a few seconds. Immediately upon identifying himself, the Rosh Yeshivah informed me that he had good tidings to share with me. "'Blessed be Hashem,' he said with a tone of relief. 'I am happy to inform you that I figured out some manner of proceeding within the sugyah which sheds a new light on the entire subject matter.' The Rosh Yeshivah sounded so upbeat, as if he were sharing with me the news of having hit the jackpot in the lottery. I asked him to give me some details, but he politely postponed it for the following evening. 'I merely wanted to put you at ease so that you can sleep peacefully, knowing that we are on the road to resolve the difficulty.' "My sleep was indeed restful. What amazed me was not merely the fact that the Rosh Yeshivah had remained awake until 1:30 toiling over the complicated Mordechai. I was genuinely grateful to Hashem for having granted me the zechus of sharing a study session with such a humble person, who in his naiveté assumed that everyone was as consumed with the same love of Torah as he was, to the degree that a difficulty with a Mordechai would cause insomnia."

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Skyscrapers have been part of the American skyline for so many years that most people simply take them for granted. In Israel forty years ago, though, they were practically nonexistent. At that time, a group of talmidim stared in amazement at the skyscraper they saw for the first time as they drove through Tel Aviv. One of them glanced at their rebbe. Harav Shach, zt"l, to see how he was reacting to the wondrous sight. He wasn't; he continued to focus on the Gemara he held in his lap, just as he had been doing the entire ride. "Don't you want to see the tallest building in the country?" the bochur asked the Rosh Yeshivah. "I'd love to see it," he responded. "but a person is granted a limited number of opportunities to be amazed, until he becomes inured to it. I want to make sure I am always amazed by the magnificence of the Torah."

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The temptation of the Haskala great. It was taking down boys from the finest Torah homes. The haskala offered intellectual stimulation and provided an excuse to throw off the responsibility of being a halachic Jew. The young man was brilliant and no effort was spared by the enemies of the Torah to convince him to join their ranks. Yet one memory from his youth made him decide to stay in the yeshivah world and gave him the strength to turn his back on the lures of the haskala movement. When he was a lad of about eight, he made a siyum on mishnayos. His mother was overjoyed by his accomplishment. She put on her finest Shabbos clothes, set the table in a festive manner, and together they celebrated his achievement. The memory of how his mother valued Torah so much came back to him in full force at this critical juncture in his life and tilted the scales in favor of truth. The young man was Harav Yitzchak Hutner, zt"l.

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ As mentioned earlier, the Brisker Rav would convalesce in the resort town of Schuls, Switzerland. On one of his stays there, during the Torah reading in the synagogue on Shabbos, the man honored with taking the sefer Torah out of the ark took the opportunity to honor The Brisker Rav by bringing it over to where he stood so that he could kiss it. The Brisker Rav found fault in the man's actions. "You have taken a mitzvah away from me," he told him, explaining that honoring the

sefer Torah is something we do by leaving our place and going towards it to kiss it. This man had done the opposite, honoring The Brisker Rav by bringing the Torah to his seat. He had thus taken away The Brisker Rav's opportunity to honor the Torah.

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 439

❖ On Shabbos Shuvah, 1992, the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur) delivered a shmuess in the beis medrash (later published in his sefer Pnei Menachem) wherein he addressed the following point: "It is difficult for us to understand Hashem's ways with our limited intellect. Any time [special] children, children who are born deaf or blind, come to this world, we wonder, 'Why were such children born? Why did Hashem send them down here?' The answer is to give schar to those who brought them here. Their merit is that they were brought into this world in kedushah. Their entry into the world helps the other children in the family and other neshamos. They bring benefit to all of Klal Yisrael." The scene? Simchas Torah in the Gerrer beis medrash. As was his wont, the Rebbe would stand in his place, and those who had been honored with a hakafah would file past him, holding a sefer Torah. With great love, the Rebbe would extend his hand and kiss each sefer Torah as it passed. As this was happening, the Rebbe noticed a special child standing not far from him. He walked over, touched the child, and kissed him in the same way he had just kissed the sifrei Torah. "He too is a sefer Torah," the Rebbe said.

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Shortly after Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz's yeshivah was founded in Slabodka, a fire broke out not far from Reb Baruch Ber's house. The residents of the burning building hurried to save their belongings. Reb Baruch Ber and his wife started collecting their things, as a precaution in case the fire would reach their house. When Reb Baruch Ber came outside holding what he wanted to save, the Rebbetzin saw that he was carrying only sifrei kodesh, along with handwritten manuscripts of many of his chiddushei Torah. As they stood there, watching the fire, he turned to her and said, "I saved my jewelry. What about you? Did you save your jewelry, too?"

Reb Baruch Ber, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, Published by Feldheim

❖ It is well known that the material accommodations in the Mirrer Yeshivah are better than adequate. The meals are rated as the tastiest in the yeshivah world. This was a clear policy directive of the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel. He wanted the students to know that he was straining on their behalf, in expectation that they would apply commensurate efforts in their learning. Any time someone proposed to scrimp in this area Reb Nosson Zvi would consistently veto. Once a gvir presented Reb Nosson Zvi with a seven-figure check. As he handed it to the Rosh Yeshivah he said that he would like the yeshivah to save money by serving soy schnitzel instead of poultry. Without a second's hesitation, Reb Nosson Zvi returned the check and said softly, "When you eat soy, they will eat soy. Bachurim who learn deserve the best."

For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 227

❖ Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, even if not yet able to appreciate Reb Lazer Yuddel's scholarship lived in the same home as the Rosh Yeshivah, dined at the same table and used the same facilities. One early morning, Reb Lazer Yuddel (who was a widower), certain that his housemate was asleep, went over and caressed and kissed each volume of the Shas. Nosson Zvi, who slept in the living room, lay there blinking in the dark. Never had he beheld such manifest ahavas haTorah. Was this a defining moment? It was more than that. It was a crowning affirmation of everything that he had seen until that point in his great — uncle's behavior and the deportment of those affiliated with the Mir. Comment has been made (sometimes ascribed to Reb Elchonon Wasserman zt"l) that in the secular world, the closer you get to the luminaries, the more faults

you discover. But in the Torah world, the closer you scrutinize, the more impressive the visage. Nosson Zvi certainly could have testified to the wisdom of this adage for he was able to observe his great-uncle in personal moments, and he was overwhelmed — and overwhelmed afresh by the man's greatness.' Is it a wonder that he wanted to emulate him? '.

For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 114

❖ Dinner and seudah shlishis, however, were reserved for the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Eliezer Yehuda Finkel's (Reb Lazer Yudel, Rosh Yeshivah of the Mir) home, and the company usually included the future Gaon, Reb Rephael Shmuelevitz (Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz's oldest son and the grandson of Reb Lazer Yuddel). Friday night was earmarked for Reb Rephael to relate a chiddush and Reb Nosson Zvi had the seudah shlishis spot. (When Reb Rephael Shmuelevitz was wed, his place was taken by his youngest brother, Reb Avraham Shmuelevitz.) It happened one time that another American bachur was also a guest of the Rosh Yeshivah for the seudah shlishis. As always, young Nosson Zvi was requested to relate what he had prepared, and Reb Lazer Yuddel got so excited by his recitation that you would think that he had hit the Torah jackpot. The other guest was thoroughly flummoxed. The idea Nosson Zvi had expressed, while sound and true, was hardly deep or brilliant. Thus, when Nosson Zvi departed, the guest could not resist asking the Rosh Yeshivah what the excitement was all about. Reb Lazer Yuddel responded succinctly, "You heard only the Torah, while I heard the ahavas haTorah expressed in every single word!"

For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 119

B. TO RUN WHEN DOING A MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a mitzvah to run eagerly to the synagogue (beis hakneses), to the study hall (beis hamedrash), and toward the performance of any sacred mitzvah. It is praiseworthy to run for the sake of a mitzvah even on Shabbos — when running for mundane purposes is ordinarily restricted — as Scripture states: "Let us know, let us pursue eagerly to know Hashem" (Hoshea 6:3).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The disciples asked Rabbi Tarfon: 'Master, teach us — by what merit did the tribe of Yehudah earn the crown of kingship over Israel?' After showing that none of their partial guesses sufficed, Rabbi Tarfon told them the true story: When the tribes of Israel stood at the edge of the Reed Sea (Yam Suf), one tribe said, 'I am going down into the sea first!' and another tribe said, 'I am going down first!' While they stood debating, the tribe of Binyamin leaped forward into the waves, and the princes of Yehudah pelted them in holy zeal; then Nachshon ben Aminadav and the tribe of Yehudah sanctified Hashem's Name and marched straight into the churning sea until the waters split before them! Therefore Binyamin merited that the Divine Presence (Shechinah) rested in his territory, and Yehudah merited the eternal crown of royalty in Israel!

Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Tractate Vayehi Beshalach 6:8

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ During Rabbi Avigdor Miller's early years in his shul, before his full schedule of shiurim, he was once talking to two close talmidim and told them with great excitement, "I am going on a vacation." From the gleam in his eye, they were sure that he was traveling to a resort for the first time, and they were truly happy for him. But he then explained his itinerary: "My family is going up to the country while I will stay behind. I will close the shades, take the phone off the hook, spread out the sefarim all over the dining room table, and learn ten hours straight. That's a vacation!" In a related incident, Shimon, who learned in kollel, was trying to help Yoram, an irreligious Israeli, tackle his questions about Judaism. After many months, Yoram was convinced intellectually that Judaism was true but was still reluctant to make the commitment to become fully observant. Finally, Yoram asked, "Are religious Jews really happy?" Thinking about how best to respond, Shimon's eye fell on a picture he had in a drawer. He took it out and asked the man, "How old do you think the person in the picture is?" Yoram looked at the picture and guessed that the man was about 55. "And what if I told you he was close to 90?" Shimon said. Yoram couldn't believe it. Shimon explained to him that the happiness of the man in the picture kept him fresh and young-looking. "Who is that, what is his name?" Yoram asked. "Rabbi Avigdor Miller," Shimon replied. This incident made a deep impression on Yoram, and he decided to become observant and began sending his children to yeshivah.

From Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and His Revolution, By Yaakov Y. Hamburger, Published by Judaica Press

❖ Reb Yaakov Galinsky once tried to help a boy gain acceptance into a certain yeshivah. The committee turned him down. Reb Yaakov was already ninety-one years old, frail and weak, but giving up was never his way. He hired a taxi to the yeshivah, determined to plead the boy's case in person. When he arrived, he found the gates locked, since classes had not yet begun. So what did he do? He asked for a chair, climbed onto the fence, and jumped down into the courtyard. From there, he went straight to the Rosh Yeshivah to beg him to reconsider, and to accept the boy.

From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, by Rebbetzin G. Lehrer

C. NOT TO PASS OVER THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should immediately perform the first mitzvah that presents itself. One must never bypass or defer an immediate mitzvah in order to perform another one later, as Chazal established the foundational principle: "We do not pass over mitzvos" (ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A Jewish prisoner was granted permission by the warden to leave prison for just one single day of his choice during the entire year. He asked which day he should choose: Yom Kippur to daven with the congregation, Pesach for the Seder, Purim for Megillah, or the very first day available?

Answer: He should leave the first day he can, because he should not pass over the mitzvos that are in front of him.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Berachos, p. 142

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It once happened after Pesach that Rabban Gamliel was walking along the road and saw a fine white bread roll lying discarded on the road. He said to his servant Tavi, 'Pick up this bread roll.' Seeing a gentile coming toward him, Rabban Gamliel called out to him, 'Mavgai! Take this bread roll!' Rabbi Ilai ran after the gentile and asked him, 'What is your name?' He answered, 'Mavgai.' 'And where are you from?' He answered, 'From the nearby station-villages.' 'Has Rabban Gamliel ever known you before in your life?' He replied, 'No!' Thus they saw that Rabban Gamliel had perceived his name through Divine inspiration. And from his actions on that day they learned three halachic lessons: first, that one does not walk past food lying on the ground without picking it up (so that blessings are not treated with contempt); second, that the chametz of a non-Jew is permitted for benefit immediately after Pesach; and third, that we follow the majority of travelers in assuming the bread belonged to a non-Jew.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah 1:9 (40a)

D. NOT TO DO MANY MITZVOS AT ONCE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What is wrong with doing two at once?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should not combine two separate mitzvos into a single hasty act, because doing so prevents giving each sacred obligation its due reverence and meticulous attention. As Chazal established: "We do not perform mitzvos in bundles" (ein osin mitzvos chavilos chavilos).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A grandson once showed him a picture in a newspaper depicting an apparent conflict between two Jewish groups. “It’s trick photography,” ' Rav Miller said. “The media loves to drum up conflicts even when there is none. These Jews really love each other and so we love both groups.”. “But they seem to really be fighting," his grandson persisted. “I will explain,” Rabbi Miller replied. “The army has many divisions, ground troops, the marines, the navy, the air force, etc. Each is convinced that they are the best and most important, and naturally they feel an animosity toward the other branches. Yet, as far as the rest of the nation is concerned they appear as one unified army supporting its country. And that is, how everyone must look at them, for that is all that concerns them. Every soldier must know where he belongs and stay there — and so should you.” The grandson asked, “Who should I side with?” “You just have to know that you are in the army of Hashem,” Rabbi Miller answered, “and continue doing Whatever service you are performing, keeping your own position. You don’t have to be concerned with the issues of others.

From Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and Revolution, by Yaakov Y. Hamburger, published by Judaica Press

❖ Rav Chaim Kanievsky related that the Chazon Ish once saw a homeless person sleeping in the street. He invited him to his house to eat a meal, but the man declined. "Can we perhaps talk and learn?" asked the Chazon Ish. "I don't know how to learn," the man replied. "Do you know how to sing?" asked the Chazon Ish. "Yes," replied the man and broke into song. The

Chazon Ish began dancing in the street. He waved his walking stick in the air as he danced along to the man's tune for a few minutes. The Chazon Ish told the person that it was now an ideal situation for them to rejoice with the many passing pedestrians and neighbors, as everyone seemed to enjoy the man's singing and the Chazon Ish's dancing.

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

❖ In a very rare occurrence, someone once lashed out at Rav Shlomo Rothenberg. "Rabbi, everything you say is just lip service!" Without losing his cool, Rav Shlomo looked at the man and responded, "All my life, I've been working on myself to do all my actions l'Shem Shamayim. If you want to criticize one of my faults, choose something else." The following day, this fellow was walking down the street when he noticed Rav Shlomo walking toward him. Mortified, he tried to quicken his pace to avoid an uncomfortable confrontation, but to his bewilderment, he saw Rav Shlomo crossing the street in his direction, a big smile on his face! Before he had a chance to think of what to say or do, Rav Shlomo greeted him with open arms and proceeded to give him a big hug, telling him not to worry about what had happened the day before. This fellow told a talmid, "Your rosh yeshivah could have embarrassed me on many occasions, and the real truth is that I always thought the punch was coming! But to my surprise, it never came! To the contrary, when your rosh yeshivah would meet me, he would always greet me with genuine warmth, as if nothing had ever transpired between us.

From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Once, a woman claimed she had received a Get from her husband but lost it, leaving Yerushalayim's rabbanim in a quandary. Reb Chaim Leib asked that the woman be brought to him and said to her, "When a woman gets married, the custom is for her to walk around the chassan seven times. If the couple gets divorced, however, there are two prevalent customs: one is for her to make seven counter-revolutions around the husband and the other is to perform only two. How many did you make when you received your get?" She thought for a moment, and—thinking it smart to go "l'chumra"—answered, "Seven." Reb Chaim Leib promptly pronounced her a fraud, and the woman broke down and conceded her guilt.

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

E. NOT TO DO IT IN A DEMEANING WAY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

As it says "you shall pour the blood and cover it with dirt" (Vayikra 17:13, Parshas Acharei Mos).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must exercise meticulous reverence toward every mitzvah, treating no commandment with casual disrespect. In the mitzvah of covering the blood of a slaughtered animal (kisuy hadam), Scripture commands: "He shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth" (Vayikra 17:13). Chazal deduce that just as the pouring was done with dignity by hand, so must the covering be performed with the hand or a vessel, and never kicked with the foot, ensuring that mitzvos are never demeaned (shelo yehu mitzvos bezuyos alav). This principle serves as an enduring paradigm for all mitzvos. Hashem regards His commandments as His royal emissaries, and an emissary represents the Sender Himself (shelucho shel adam k'moso); consequently, honoring His mitzvos honors the Almighty, while disparaging them is an affront to His glory.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Expounding the verse (Ecclesiastes 12:14), 'For God shall bring every deed into judgment, even everything hidden, whether it be good or whether it be evil,' the scholars of the Academy of Rabbi Yannai asked: What is a deed that appears good yet turns into evil? One who gives charity to a poor person in full public view in a way that humiliates him! Such was the incident when Rabbi Yannai saw a certain man handing a silver zuz to a poor person in front of a crowd in the street, causing the poor man's face to flush with shame. Rabbi Yannai stepped forward and said to the donor: 'It would have been better had you not given him that coin at all, rather than giving it to him in public and putting him to shame!'

Chagigah 9:12

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A talmid chacham once came to speak with Rav Dovid Feinstein, and he was immediately confronted by this unexpected sight. Reb Dovid Feinstein was restocking the soda machine in the yeshivah's front hallway. This was a common occurrence, but the visitor was shocked to see it. The visitor was stunned and tried to do the task, but Reb Dovid didn't let him. "It is my mitzvah," he said simply, not understanding why the other person would try to take it. "But it is not appropriate for the Rosh Yeshivah!" the visitor argued. "What's your mekor, your source, that this is called 'eino l'fi k'vodo'?" Reb Dovid asked. "It brings in money for Torah, so to me it's a great kavod."

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

F. TO BEAUTIFY THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

As it says "this is my God and I will beautify it (Shemos 15:2, Parshas Beshalach)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One is commanded to beautify and elevate the performance of every mitzvah (hiddur mitzvah), as Scripture states: "This is my God and I will beautify Him" (Shemos 15:2). Chazal expound: "Beautify yourself before Him in the mitzvos" — by acquiring an exquisite esrog, an aesthetically pleasing sukkah, fine tzitzis and a graceful tallis, an ornate Sefer Torah, and similarly with all sacred commandments. Furthermore, Chazal taught that one should expend up to an additional third of the standard cost to beautify a mitzvah.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 19)

Adorning and beautifying a mitzvah (hidur) is a direct expression of Ahavas Hashem. It demonstrates that one does not serve the Almighty as a servant fulfilling a burdensome chore, but as a loving child who delights in bringing joy to his Father beyond what was minimally commanded.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes places side by side two traditional interpretations of 'This is my God and I will beautify Him.' Rashi connects the phrase with building a sanctuary for Hashem, while the Gemara associates it with beautifying mitzvos. At first those sound like different explanations: one speaks of a building and the other of the way a commandment is performed. The Sfas Emes proposes that both are really expressions of the same possibility. When Israel are spiritually worthy, Hashem's presence can rest within the people themselves. Through the 248 positive commandments, the 248 limbs become refined, and the person is a kind of living Mishkan. Tracing the shift from the effortless spiritual crowns before the sin of the Golden Calf to the deliberate construction of the Mishkan afterward, the Sfas Emes shows how hiddur mitzvah rebuilds a sanctuary of beauty within human action (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5646).

• This Pesach discourse explicitly cites the rabbinic explanation of 'This is my God and I will beautify Him' as adorning oneself before Hashem through mitzvos. The Sfas Emes begins from the extraordinary clarity experienced at the splitting of the sea. Chazal say that even a maidservant perceived at that moment what great prophets had not seen. Rather than reducing hiddur mitzvah to external ornament, the Sfas Emes reveals that the beauty of a mitzvah reflects the inner refinement of the human body as a luminous garment for the soul. The Sfas Emes anchors this teaching in the words: “On the verse: This is my God and I will glorify Him—beautify yourself before Him in the performance of mitzvos” (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5643).

• Rashi and the Gemara seem to pull “and I shall glorify Him” (ve-anveihu) in two directions: Rashi says it means "I will build Him a sanctuary" — while the Gemara (Shabbos 133b) says adorn yourself before Him with the mitzvos. Is the verse about a building for Him, or about an adornment of ourselves? The Sfas Emes, expounding the Shira in the Pesach inyan, finds the tension resolved in the longing of Israel themselves: it was upon this that Israel yearned when they said it. The longing itself tells us what the word means, for they did not yet have a Mishkan, and yet they already knew what adornment was. And according to the kedusha found in the hearts of Israel, they merit to build the actual Mishkan, as it says, “And I shall dwell within them” (ve-shachanti be-socham). When the limbs become His dwelling through the mitzvos, His pride rests in us — and His pride in us is the very beauty we confer upon Him. To beautify the mitzvah is to become the place where He is beautiful (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5645).

• The Sfas Emes begins with the verse at the splitting of the sea, 'This is my God and I will beautify Him,' and explicitly cites the rabbinic interpretation of adorning one's mitzvos. His subject is not only the physical attractiveness of a ritual object. He asks what true beauty means after Israel emerged from the long suffering of Egypt. The descent into slavery had not been purposeless: it humbled the bodily dimension and prepared the spiritual dimension to be lifted. At the sea, Israel experienced something of the exaltation of the angels, perceiving that the true picture of a person is shaped by the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. The Sfas Emes anchors this teaching in the words: “On the verse: This is my God and I will glorify Him—our Sages expounded: Beautify yourself before Him in mitzvos” (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Beshalach 5650).

• In this Pesach teaching the Sfas Emes pauses over the startling confidence of the words 'I will beautify Him.' How can a human being promise to adorn or build a dwelling for the Creator, whose exaltation exceeds every conceivable human action? He connects this with the song at the sea, where Israel moved from the constriction of danger into an expansive proclamation of closeness to Hashem. Their mouths had cried from the narrow place in Egypt, and now those same mouths were able to sing of an extraordinary relationship with the Divine. He

> suggests that Israel's statement arose from intense longing. A small action is finite, but when it arises from genuine longing and awareness of Hashem's greatness, it can become a meeting point with holiness. Beautifying a mitzvah is therefore the tangible expression of an overflowing inner yearning that Hashem Himself helps bring into physical form (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5647).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ What miracles were performed for the doors of Nikanor? Nikanor traveled all the way to Alexandria in Egypt to commission two magnificent, intricately wrought copper doors for the Eastern Gate of the Temple Courtyard. As he was sailing back across the Mediterranean toward the Land of Israel, a violent gale rose up on the sea and threatened to sink the ship. To lighten the vessel, the sailors lifted one of the heavy copper doors and threw it overboard into the raging sea — yet the storm still did not subside! When the sailors moved to throw the second door overboard as well, Nikanor leaped up, wrapped his arms tightly around the door, and cried out: 'If you throw her into the sea, throw me in together with her!' Immediately the sea calmed from its fury! Throughout the rest of the voyage, Nikanor grieved deeply over the first door that had been lost in the depths. Yet the moment the ship sailed into the harbor of Acco, the lost copper door popped out from right underneath the hull of the ship, having floated miraculously behind them all the way across the sea (and some say a great sea creature swallowed it and spat it out onto the dry land at Acco)! Therefore, even when all the other gates of the Temple were later plated over with gold, the Sages left the copper Gates of Nikanor untouched, because miracles had been performed through them and their burnished copper gleamed like pure gold!

Talmud Bavli, Yoma 38a (75:2–4)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In advance of Pesach each year, Rav Pam joined a distinguished group of Torah Vodaath alumni in overseeing the baking of the matzos which they would use for the Seder. One year, a new bakery opened which employed a number of hiddurim (halachic stringencies) in the baking process. Some members of the group thought that it would be an excellent idea to use the new bakery for their baking. They presented the suggestion to Rav Pam who said, "just as there is a mitzvah to be mehader (make use of stringencies) in the matzos, so too, is it a mitzvah to be mehader in helping another Jew to earn a livelihood." They remained at their original bakery.

Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rav Avrohom Yaakov Hakohen Pam, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Paysach Krohn told this beautiful story: There was a family of nine, in Yerushalayim, named the Wagners. Every year, they went on a vacation. They didn't have a lot of money, nor did they own a car. But every year, they rented a minivan to take their children on a trip. Before the trip, the parents would explain: "This is where we're going. You'll each have a small allowance to spend. The car will be packed with food, and we're sticking to the itinerary -- no extra stops." They planned a beautiful trip, including a visit to Tzfat, jeeping, and a boat ride on the Kinneret. Everyone knew exactly where they were going and what they could spend. On the first day, they stopped in Netanya. It was beautiful, and they sat together at the Mediterranean Sea to eat lunch. The kids enjoyed the food, and the parents relaxed. When they finished eating, their eight-year-old son said, "Abba, I need the bathroom." The father looked around for a nearby restroom. Since they were in a public area with no facilities, he decided to take his son to a nearby kosher restaurant. The father felt guilty -- he knew that restaurants generally prefer not to let people use the facilities without ordering something. But what choice did they have? At the entrance, he saw a waitress and said apologetically, "I'm so sorry. I know we're not buying anything, but my little boy really needs to use the bathroom. Would it be okay if he just went in for a moment?" The waitress hesitated, looked around, and then whispered, "It's okay. Go ahead." The little boy used the restroom, and as they left, the head waiter saw them and lost his temper. "What are you doing here?" the waiter yelled. "Do you think this is a public

bathroom? Who gave you permission to come in here? You religious people think you can just walk in and use whatever you want!" The father stood there, calm but tense, as the head waiter ranted. He noticed the waitress nearby, visibly frightened that she would get into trouble. She had done him a favor, and if he admitted that she allowed them in, she could lose her job. The father let the waiter finish yelling. Then, with a warm smile, he said, " I think there's been a misunderstanding. We are actually planning to eat here." The head waiter blinked in surprise. "What?" The father continued, "I came in with my son first, but our whole family is waiting in the car. There are nine of us, and we're all coming in to eat." The waiter's demeanor changed instantly. "Oh, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to yell at you. It's just that some people take advantage of us, and I thought..." "No problem," the father interrupted kindly. "Just show us where to sit." He turned to his son and said, "Go bring everyone in from the car." The children couldn't believe it. They had never eaten at a restaurant before, and neither had their parents. The family gathered around the tables, which the staff pushed together to accommodate them all. The kids marveled at the menus, having never seen one before. Each child was allowed to order one drink and one meal. They enjoyed the experience, though the parents nervously eyed the prices. Still, they let their children savor the moment. Toward the end of the meal, the family noticed unusual activity near the kitchen. Suddenly, seven waiters, led by the head waiter, emerged from the back, each carrying a dessert -- ice cream and cake with sparklers on top. Everyone in the restaurant watched in awe as the waiters approached their table. As if on cue, each waiter placed a dessert in front of one of the children. The children beamed, delighted by the unexpected treat. Mr. Wagner, confused, turned to the head waiter and said, "I think there's been a mistake. We didn't order dessert." The head waiter smiled and replied, "Let me explain. After you sat down, the waitress who let you in came into the kitchen in tears. We asked her why she was crying, and she told us something remarkable. She said, 'That man came in with no intention of ordering anything. But when he realized that I might get in trouble, he brought in his whole family just to protect me. I was so scared when the waiter started yelling at me. I thought I'd lose my job, and I was already trying to figure out where I could find another one.'" The head waiter smiled warmly. "We brought you the desserts because we wanted to do something special for a family as special as yours." The children gleefully finished their desserts, and Mr. Wagner asked for the bill. When it arrived, there was a note at the bottom: "From now on, any time you visit this restaurant, you get 50% off." Mr. Wagner called over the restaurant manager and said, "Thank you so much for the discount. But what about today? How much do we owe you for this meal?" The manager smiled and replied, "We have a policy here: we don't charge malachim (angels). And today, we had the honor of serving angels."

Table Talk, Edition 412 (Parshas Succos), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ R' Betzalel Leiser and R' Chaim Heiman would bring Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin an esrog every year as a gift, to use on Succos. One year they brought Rav Elya Meir a truly beautiful, very large, Teimaner (Yemenite) esrog. When Rav Elya Meir, who was accustomed to using a Yemenite esrog, saw the esrog and noticed its perfect shape, his eyes lit up. It was clear that his heart was irresistibly drawn to that esrog. His love of mitzvos was evident as he relished the beautiful esrog. What happened next, however, showed so clearly how Rav Elya Meir's every action was governed by his exemplary middos and mussar. "I cannot accept this esrog," the Rosh Yeshivah said, despite the clear longing in his heart. "Why not?" R' Betzalel asked, puzzled. "Isn't it the most exquisite esrog?" "Yes, it certainly is," the Rav Elya Meir answered wistfully. "However, a few days ago, someone else brought me a 'Teimaner esrog' as a gift, and I accepted it. That esrog is also a nice one, though not nearly as nice as this one. If I take this one and use it, that Yid might feel bad or slighted that I'm not using the esrog that he gifted to me." The Rosh Yeshivah paused, then said, "And I cannot be the cause of his chalishas hadaas (becoming dispirited)." "What I saw from that episode," R' Betzalel shares, "was his tangible love of mitzvos. But even more than that, I saw the way he balanced competing, pivotal values of middos and mitzvos."

From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, by Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A king wished to build a magnificent palace for himself, the likes of which had never before been seen. The king's officers therefore hired a world-renowned architect who was known to be an expert in his field. The architect was brought before the king and, shortly thereafter, presented him an extraordinary blueprint for a palace that would be both enormous and awe — inspiring. The blueprint found favor in the eyes of the king, and he gave orders to commence construction at once. He had but one request to make of the architect, however: He desired that the palace be completed on the anniversary of his ascension to the throne. He would then stage a gala celebration, during which the new palace would be dedicated. The builders expended much effort and, indeed, a glorious new palace, whose beauty was unmatched by any other edifice, stood completed one month before the designated time. In order to paint the palace walls, the king hired four expert painters. Each one was assigned one wall and was instructed to paint it with vibrant and cheerful colors. Three out of the four painters began working immediately. They mixed colors together and decorated the walls with an array of patterns. One of the painters, however, sat idly by and did not begin painting. "Why have you not begun working?" asked one of the painters. "If you do not start now, you will be unable to finish in time!" "Don't worry," responded the painter. "I will have plenty of time to finish." Nearly one month later, the three painters had produced walls of sheer beauty; a fantastic kaleidoscope of colors blended harmoniously into matching patterns that were amazing to behold. The fourth wall, however, stood embarrassingly empty of any color or magnificence whatsoever. One day before the king's anniversary, the painter went to the palace and hung large mirrors on the fourth wall that reflected the other three walls. Now the fourth wall appeared to be painted as well, and it looked quite splendid. When the king entered the palace and beheld its sheer beauty, he was ecstatic. Wishing to show his appreciation for his workers' efforts, the king ordered his servants to bring in three bags filled with gold coins and jewelry. He then instructed them to hang the bags on the three painted walls. "Here you go," said the king to the painters. "Your reward is hanging on the wall that you painted." "But what about my reward?" asked the clever fourth painter. "Your reward," answered the king, "is reflected in the mirror that you hung on the wall..." The lesson that this parable imparts to us is clear — the reward is in proportion to the exertion (Pirkei Avos 5:26)!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

G. TO DO A MITZVAH WITH ZEAL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

As it is written "and Abraham got up early in the morning" (Breishis 22,3 Parshas Vayeira)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should perform every mitzvah with enthusiastic alacrity (zerizus). Whenever a mitzvah applies during the daytime, one should awaken early to fulfill it without delay, as modeled by Avraham Avinu, of whom Scripture testifies: "And Avraham arose early in the morning" (Bereishis 22:3). From this Chazal derived the principle that the zealous are early to perform mitzvos (zerizin makdimin l'mitzvos). Likewise, for a mitzvah designated for the night, one should fulfill it promptly at nightfall. Chazal highlighted the immense power of spiritual promptness by noting that because the elder daughter of Lot preceded the younger by a single night, her descendant merited entering the royal lineage of Israel four generations earlier.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A father preparing for his son's Bris Milah on the eighth day faced a scheduling conflict: He could perform the circumcision early in the morning immediately after sunrise, but only a few guests would be able to attend; alternatively, he could schedule the circumcision for the afternoon, enabling a large assembly of family and friends to participate. Which halachic value takes precedence: the alacrity of zerizim makdimim l'mitzvos (the zealous perform mitzvos early) or the grandeur of b'rov am hadras melech (in the multitude of people is the King's glory)?

Answer: Citing the Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh De'ah 262:8) and Minchas Yitzchak (Vol. 1, Siman 49), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that when a minyan of ten men is present in the morning, performing the bris milah early in the morning fulfills zerizim makdimim l'mitzvos and takes precedence over delaying the bris until the afternoon merely to assemble a larger crowd ('b'rov am hadras Melech'), as delaying a bris for convenience is strongly discouraged by the poskim.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Megillah, p. 271

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In a certain city lived a very wealthy man who earned his living selling grain wholesale across the land. On one occasion, he met a friend and related his concerns to him: "It is certainly true," said the wealthy man, "that I have a multitude of employees and my business has spread into various branches. Nevertheless, I am not earning a great deal of profit as there is much competition, and my competitors expend much effort in trying to lower their prices in order to sell their merchandise." Some time later, a great war erupted in the land and, once again, the wealthy man encountered his friend. "How has your business been faring during the war?" asked the friend. "Wonderful!" exclaimed the wealthy man joyously, rubbing his hands together in a display of happiness. "Baruch Hashem, business has never been so good." His friend was rather astonished. "Can business really be so profitable during wartime?" he asked. "Why, there is such a meager supply of grain to meet the demand!" "That is precisely why I am prospering so," replied the wealthy man. "You see, before the war, customers came to me demanding excellent flour. They would examine my produce and, if the flour was not to their liking, they would simply go to another store. But presently," he continued, "there is a major shortage of flour; the customers therefore do not check it at all — they just grab whatever they can before there is nothing left..." If such is the case with grain, remarked the Chofetz Chaim, how much more so is it true in relation to Torah and mitzvos. In previous generations, the Jewish Nation had great Torah giants. A person, concluded the Chofetz Chaim, should therefore not say, "What am I in comparison to the earlier generations, and of what value is my Torah study?" Such an individual is making a grave error, for in times such as these, any manner of Torah study and any mitzvah that one fulfills is considered "sought-after merchandise" and is very esteemed in the eyes of Hashem.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A story is told about the day the very first locomotive pulled into the railroad station of a tiny shtetl. The local chassidim were anxious to show this technological "miracle" to their Rebbe and witness his reaction. The Rebbe, escorted by his followers, made his way to the depot and noted the long train of cars stretching out to beyond the horizon. Just as he was examining this modern mode of transportation, the furnace was stoked and the boiler began to heat up. Billows of black smoke belched from the chimney. The engine roared and the brakes screeched. Suddenly the wheels began to revolve, and the chugging locomotive set the entire train into motion. "Rebbe, Rebbe," the chassidim shouted excitedly over the din, "what do you say about this incredible invention, this culmination of man's genius and resourcefulness?" The Rebbe pondered for a moment and then replied, "I see that one fiery, hot creation can carry along with it many, many cold ones."

Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

❖ In the Rosh HaYeshiva, Rav Aharon Schechter's bungalow in Camp Morris, there was an Israeli bachur who was at the Rosh HaYeshiva's seudah on Shabbos. The Rosh Yeshivah asked him to sing a zemer l'chvod Shabbos. The bachur refused the offer. The Rosh Yeshivah asked why not. The bachur said that he has busha. When pressed more by the Rosh Yeshivah, the bachur said that busha is a good middah, the middah of Yitzchok Avinu, so why was the Rosh Yeshivah giving him a hard time? The Rosh Yeshivah responded, "A person needs not just to have good middos, but to be a Baal middos. The word baal means a master. If you cannot forgo your busha for the sake of kavod Shabbos, that means you may have the middah of busha, but you did not acquire it through avodah. You must be a baalim on your middos!"

Table Talk, Edition 375 (Parshas Mishpatim), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

H. NOT TO TRY TO DO A MITZVAH FOR FREE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should never seek to fulfill a mitzvah for free. Rather, he should willingly invest his financial resources to acquire its requirements at full value without grievance or hesitation, following the example of King David, who declared: "I will not offer burnt offerings to Hashem my God for free" (Shmuel II 24:24). The holy Zohar explains that investing one's own resources to fulfill a sacred precept expels the unholy forces of the sitra achra, ensuring that the mitzvah is illuminated by genuine devotion.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Outsiders were not allowed to step inside the building of Beis HaTalmud of Kelm without permission. Sometimes, Reb Simcha Zissel would be selective even among the students of Beis HaTalmud themselves, allowing only certain talmidim to listen to certain shmuessen. Other times, he would charge a token admission fee to those who attended his "standard" shmuessen, and a larger fee — two or three rubles — for "special shmuezen"' His attitude was that this served to enhance the value of his words and to heighten the strength of their influence. No one took his words lightly. Those who experienced his shmuessen have attested to the fact that even just a few weeks of attending Reb Simcha Zissel's shmuessen transformed them completely. Having absorbed his words, their outlook on life and their feelings in general were never the same again.

Reb Elya, By David J. Schlossberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

14. Not to Perform Holy Acts in the Presence of Nakedness or Excrement

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-40

As it says, "A designated place should be for you outside the camp and you will go out here" (Devarim 23:13, Parshas Ki Seitzei). And it is written "you shall have a shovel with your tools" (Devarim 23:14). and you cover your excrement, and your camp shall be holy.

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Why is this mitzvah said during a time of war?
- What are you expressing if you violate this?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture commands: "You shall have a designated place outside the camp, and you shall go out there" (Devarim 23:13), and further states: "And you shall have a spade among your implements... and you shall cover your excrement, and your camp shall be holy" (Devarim 23:14–15). Rambam rules that these specific encampment ordinances were commanded for a military campaign, as the verse explicitly states: "For Hashem your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to hand over your enemies before you; therefore shall your camp be holy" (Devarim 23:15). Nevertheless, the Talmud in the third chapter of Berachos establishes that it is biblically forbidden to articulate or contemplate words of Torah or prayer in the presence of urine, excrement, a bathhouse, a privy, or a foul-smelling alleyway, because the Divine presence demands absolute sanctity. Other authorities maintain that the obligation to maintain personal and environmental cleanliness for sacred speech applies at all times and places; the Torah specifically emphasized the military camp to teach that even during the exigencies and chaos of warfare, bodily sanctity must never be relaxed. Chazal warned that one who willfully contemplates words of Torah in a foul or prohibited place violates the verse: "Because he has despised the word of Hashem and broken His commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall remain upon him" (Bamidbar 15:31).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of our lives, the reason why we were brought to this world is to perfect our character, so that we can achieve G-dliness and come close to Hashem. We do all of this by means of the mitzvos of the Torah. We give honor to the Torah to remind us that Torah matters rise above all else, because it is the very purpose of our lives. This will remind us to make Torah and mitzvos a priority in our lives so that we can become Godly. This mitzvah is one way we show respect to Hashem and the Torah

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Chatzkel was invited to attend the dedication of a public educational institution. Only a select group of people were invited, and he thought it would be a Kiddush Hashem if a yeshivah bachur was present. He asked the Mashgiach, Rabbi Avigdor Miller, if he should go and explained his rationale. The Mashgiach thought a while, as he always did before answering, and said he would leave it up to Chatzkel's discretion. Chatzkel went and it turned out to be a frivolous waste of time; he was sorely disappointed. He told Rabbi Miller what had happened and the Mashgiach replied, "If you want to make a Kiddush Hashem, you should know that someone who sits in the corner of the Beis Medrash learning — even if nobody knows about it — that's a Kiddush Hashem!"

From Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and Revolution, by Yaakov Y. Hamburger, published by Judaica Press

A. NOT TO DO ANYTHING HOLY IN THE PRESENCE OF NAKEDNESS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 24–75

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to recite words of Torah, chant prayers, or utter blessings while unclothed or when facing the exposed body of another person (ervah), as Scripture commands: "That He see no unseemly thing (ervas davar) in you and turn away from you" (Devarim 23:15). It is likewise forbidden to speak or pray while facing uncovered excrement (tzo'ah).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It is noteworthy, that even after leaving Russia under conditions of pikuach nefesh clear danger to life — Rav Moshe seriously doubted whether he was justified in his decision to leave. When he met Harav Elchonon Wasserman in 5699/1939, during the latter's visit to America on behalf of his yeshivah in Baranovitch, Rav Moshe presented him with his dilemma, which rested heavily on his conscience. He was finally placated only upon hearing Rav Elchonon quote from his illustrious rebbe, the Chofetz Chaim: a country such as Russia, where Hashem's name is banned, is considered like a lavatory, where according to halachah one may not engage in Torah study. "It is impossible for a human being to live his life closeted in a lavatory," Rav Elchonon stated categorically. "Your decision was absolutely correct."

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Koppel was a beloved fourth grade rebbe. The Shapiros were so excited for their son Efraim to finally have him. In the middle of the year Rabbi Koppel's daughter gave birth to a baby boy. The school put up a big mazel tov sign. But the child developed a serious infection. The boys in his class would say Tehillim earnestly every day. After six days the baby died. The principal, Rabbi Fleger, called Rabbi Kopel to tell him he could take a few weeks off. Rabbi Koppel said he accepted Hashem's decree and he will still be coming. Rabbi Fleger removed the mazel tov sign in order to avoid any unnecessary pain. Later, Rabbi Koppel spoke to the principal: "Why did you feel it was necessary to remove the mazel tov sign? My daughter and son-in-law were zocheh to be the parents of a pure angel for six days—isn't that a reason for mazel tov?" When the Shapiro's son came home from school, they wondered how he would address it. But when they saw the smile on his face they figured he didn't talk about it. Why are you smiling they asked. The fourth grader said that Rabbi Koppel said that his grandson had passed away into the next world, but we shouldn't be sad because the baby won the lottery. He came down to the world to fulfill his mission and then went straight to gan eden.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 159

❖ While staying in America Reb Baruch Ber Liebowitz had occasion to enter a hotel restroom on Shabbos unaware that the electric light went on and off automatically whenever the door was opened or closed. Once inside, he had to wait until motzei Shabbos to come out, in order to avoid activating the light. He commented afterwards that what had disturbed him more than missing the davening and meals was the fact that he had been unable think about divrei Torah. To restrain himself from thinking about Torah was harder for him than anything else!

In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The Satmar Rebbe was fastidious about his personal cleanliness, and would not tolerate a hint of uncleanliness. In part, this was to be fit for prayer and Torah study. In fact, he thought nothing of changing clothes several times during the day if he found them unclean. Even in Bergen-Belsen, he had bartered food for tissue paper.

The Torah Personality, By Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Published by Mesorah Publications

B. NOT TO SPEAK IN THE RESTROOM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-7

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must refrain from unnecessary speech inside a restroom or lavatory, as the Sages taught that such places require absolute modesty, personal dignity, and quiet decorum.

C. NOT TO DESTROY HOLY OBJECTS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 157

As the Torah says, You shall not do so to Hashem your God (Devarim 12:4, Parshas Re'eh).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which three things are included in this prohibition?
- What if a person erased one letter from Hashem's name?
- What if someone erased a suffix added to Hashem's name?
- If a paper has Hashem's name on it, can you cut out the name and throw out the rest?
- Does the name become holy based on the person who wrote it?
- Can one ever burn a Sefer Torah?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This biblical prohibition includes the erasure of the seven sanctified Divine names. If someone erases even a single letter from any of these holy names, he violates this negative commandment. If one erases letters attached to the Divine name as a pronominal suffix — such as the final chaf ("your," singular) in Elohecha, or the chaf-mem ("your," plural) in Eloheichem — he incurs rabbinic lashes for disobedience (makas mardus).

If a holy Divine name is inscribed upon a physical vessel or object, the section bearing the name must be excised with reverence and placed in sacred burial (genizah).

If someone inscribed a sanctified Divine name upon metal and subsequently melted down the metal, he violates this negative commandment.

Anyone who willfully destroys sacred scripture or authoritative Torah commentaries transcribed in sanctity by a Jew is subject to rabbinic lashes for disobedience (makas mardus). However, if a heretic (min) transcribed a Torah scroll or sacred text, it must be burned, including all the Divine names written within it.

It is strictly forbidden to break, demolish, or vandalize any sacred object or holy vessel, such as tefillin, a mezuzah, or the stones of the Altar and the Beis HaMikdash.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The purpose of our lives, the reason why we were brought to this world is to perfect our character, so that we can achieve G-dliness and come close to Hashem. We do all of this by means of the mitzvos of the Torah. We give honor to the Torah to remind us that Torah matters rise above all else, because it is the very purpose of our lives. This will remind us to make Torah and mitzvos a priority in our lives so that we can become Godly. Not destroying or defacing anything that has holiness is one way we show respect towards Hashem and Torah.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 432)

This mitzvah helps us to develop a reverence for Hashem and his mitzvos.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A Shul needed a new chandelier. A man donated one and put a sign that it was leilui nishmas his parents. A while later the man sees that his sign was removed by the shul because it spoiled the appearance of the chandelier. He lost his trust in them and had it uninstalled. Did the donor retain the right to reclaim the chandelier once his dedication plaque was removed?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules in Chashukei Chemed (Peah, Chapter 5, p. 151) that the donor had every legal and halachic right to uninstall the chandelier (or sign) and re-donate it to another synagogue. The Rashba (1:581, cited by the Rema in Yoreh De'ah 249:13) establishes that a donor who dedicates an item to charity is fully entitled to inscribe his name or a memorial dedication upon it to serve as a lasting remembrance; the Torah itself publicly memorializes the doers of mitzvos to encourage generosity. In our times, people are extraordinarily particular about memorial inscriptions ('le'ilui nishmas'), and donors give specifically on condition that their loved one's memory is honored. When the gabbaim deliberately removed the plaque because they felt it 'spoiled the aesthetics,' they breached this foundational prerequisite, rendering the original gift a 'matanah b'ta'os' (a transfer made under mistaken pretenses). Removing the plaque constitutes gezel (theft) against the donor. Consequently, the synagogue never acquired permanent ownership of the item under those violated conditions, and because the donor rightfully lost all trust in the gabbaim, he is entitled to take it back and donate it to another shul that will faithfully honor the memorial. (HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Peah, p. 151; Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 318)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Peah, Chapter 5, p. 151 (and Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 318)

A small congregation met in a basement with only a single high window positioned directly above the holy Ark (Aron Kodesh). On a sweltering summer day with dozens of worshippers fainting from lack of oxygen, the only physical way to open the window was for someone to step directly onto the wooden structure of the holy Ark. Is it halachically permissible to step on the Aron Kodesh to open the window to relieve the congregation?

Answer: They are permitted to do so. Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that when worshippers are in acute danger of fainting or physical illness from heat and lack of oxygen, safeguarding human health and life takes precedence over the sanctity of the Aron Kodesh, provided it is done with reverence and only to relieve the immediate danger.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 451

During a terrifying raid in the Kovno Ghetto, the Nazis forced a Jew at gunpoint to burn a Sefer Torah. Another man who feared he would be ordered next considered tearing the sacred Names of Hashem out of the scroll and burying them beforehand, so that he would not be coerced into burning them. Is it permitted to tear out the sacred Names to save them from being burned?

Answer: Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l told Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein that one may never burn or destroy a Sefer Torah with one's own hands ('lo sa'asun ken la-Hashem Elokeichem'), even to prevent enemies from desecrating it; rather, one must hide it as best as possible and leave vengeance to Hashem (consistent with the Knesses Yechezkel, Siman 1). Only where Nazis force a Jew at gunpoint under threat of immediate death does pikuach nefesh override all prohibitions.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 164

Bentzion had a daughter in first grade. One day his daughter came home from school with a note. The class was going to begin saying tehillim everyday. All the students were instructed to bring in 20 dollars to purchase a pretty leather-bound tehillim for each of them to use in school. After the note went home, Bentzion heard some complaints among his neighbors. "It's bad enough that our tuition payments are through the nose, and now we have to pay extra for these fancy leather tehillim! Why can't they just give out the cheap tehillim like we used to use!" It was clear to Bentzion that some of the parents were upset at this extra expense. Bentzion had an idea. He had a close relative who had a yahrzeit soon. He called the elementary school principal, Rabbi Goldenberg, with the following idea. "Rabbi Goldenberg, I heard that the first grade girls are starting tehillim next week. I'd like to sponsor and cover the costs of the tehillim for each of the girls. I will pay $400 to cover the cost for the twenty girls in the class. In exchange can you add the name of my relative on the jackets of the Tehillim, and write that the tehillim are Leilui his Neshamah (in memory of his soul)? "That's an excellent idea," said Rabbi Goldenberg. "I hadn't thought of that. Certainly, we can do that. Thank you so much for your consideration and generosity." After Bentzion hung up, Rabbi Goldenberg realized that this was a great fundraising opportunity. If one parent was willing to pay 400 dollars to add a name on the tehillim, maybe other parents and grandparents would do the same as well. The truth was that the school was facing a very tight budget shortfall and the funds were urgently needed. This was just the fundraiser they needed! Rabbi Goldenberg picked up the phone and called 30 families to ask if they would be interested in a 400 dollar donation to defray the costs of the tehillim to add the name of a loved one on the jacket of the tehillim the children would receive. Sure enough 25 families agreed. Because of this quick campaign, the school raised an excess of 10,000 urgently needed dollars for the school. A short while later the tehillim arrived and the names of 26 people were printed in each tehillim. As Rabbi Goldenberg proudly gave a tehillim to each girl, he remembered Bentzion who gave him the idea to sponsor the tehillim. But then a flash of uncertainty hit him. It was Bentzion's idea! He probably assumed that he was the only sponsor for the tehillim! "If I gave that opportunity to him, did I have the right to offer it to others?" "What should I do now?", he thought. "Do I have to return the money to Bentzion? Do I have to return the money to the rest of the parents?" Would it be enough to simply apologize to Bentzion? What do you think? According to the Torah, was Rabbi Goldenberg allowed to offer the sponsorship to others? If not, what is Rabbi Goldenberg required to do to rectify the situation?

Answer: Regarding the question of the school raising funds by offering multiple sponsorships for the same project, it is permitted if this was the understanding of the donor and the school.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Kesubos, p. 466 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 166 (Vaera))

A man donated a bookshelf in shul in honor of an uncle that died in the Holocaust. The uncle's son walks in and he finds out that his uncle is still alive. Can he ask for his money back, or take back the shelf?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that if the donor paid for the memorial plaque out of his ma'aser or tzedakah obligations, he also intended to fulfill the mitzvah of supporting the synagogue, which remains valid even though his cousin turned out to be alive (similar to Rosh Hashanah 4a). If he paid out of his personal pocket solely to memorialize a deceased relative and had no independent intent to donate to the shul, there is a basis to view it as tzedakah b'ta'us (a mistaken donation) under the Shach (Yoreh De'ah 251:9). However, for a person of noble spirit (ba'al nefesh), the proper course is to leave the donation and affix an additional plaque beside it proclaiming: 'Give thanks to Hashem, for after fifty years it was discovered that our relative miraculously survived the Holocaust.'

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bechoros, p. 668

Money has Hashem's name on it, does it need geniza?

Answer: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 424; see also the parallel discussion in Chashukei Chemed, Shabbos 120b, pp. 609–610) that American currency bearing the motto 'In God We Trust' does not require Genizah (sacred burial) and may be used and discarded normally when worn out, for two fundamental halachic reasons: First, the Mishnah Berurah (334:52), citing the Chavos Yair (Siman 16), rules that even coins minted with the Divine Name are manufactured strictly for secular commercial circulation (nitbe'u l'hotzi'am), giving them the legal status of secular objects (k'ilu nichtevu b'feirush l'shem chol). Second, the Mishnah Berurah (85:10; see also Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 276:9 and Shach s.k. 11) rules that Divine Names written in a foreign language (la'az, such as English 'God' or Yiddish 'Gott') possess no sanctity in their written letters and are halachically permitted to be erased, though one must not utter them in an unclean place. (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 424; Chashukei Chemed, Shabbos 120b, p. 609)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 424 (and parallel in Chashukei Chemed, Shabbos 120b, p. 609)

A man's wife was sick. He cut off a small rock from the Kotel to put under her head, to be a segulah for her to get better. Is that ok?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that chipping a stone from the Kotel HaMa'aravi is a grave transgression involving three prohibitions: demolishing a stone from a sacred structure ('lo sa'asun ken la-Hashem Elokeichem', Rema Orach Chaim 152), unlawful benefit from consecrated property (me'ilah / kodesh), and damaging a communal holy site. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l instructed that the stone must be returned to the Kotel crevices and the person must perform teshuvas ha-mishkal by strengthening public reverence for the Beis HaMikdash and synagogue sanctity.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 138

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ In the era when prayers and blessings were transmitted orally so that informal sheets containing Divine Names would not be left around and burned in household fires, an incident occurred involving a man who was writing down sheets of blessings. Rabbi Yishmael went to inspect him; the moment the man heard the sound of Rabbi Yishmael's footsteps approaching, he grabbed his bundle of written blessings and threw it into a basin of water! Rabbi Yishmael said to him in pointed irony: 'The punishment of your second act—erasing the written Names in water—is even greater than the first!'

Maseches Soferim 15:4 (and Shabbos 115b)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Chofetz Chaim saw a paper lying on the street with Hebrew letters printed on it. Thinking it was kisvei kodesh, he picked it up, but after reading a few lines realized it was a page from a hebrew haskala newspaper, so he threw it back down. After walking a few steps, he went back, bent down, and picked it up again. "The next person who comes along will also think it's kisvei kodesh," he explained to a curious onlooker, "and I don't want him to be inconvenienced and have to bend down."

Impact, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

TRUST AND FAITH IN HASHEM: BITACHON & EMUNAH

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to building a trust in Hashem, and trust in the fact that Hashem loves each of us. These mitzvos help us to build a loving relationship to Hashem, which helps to inspire us to come close to Hashem by perfecting our character.

15. To Trust Wholeheartedly in Hashem (Bitachon)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-21

As it says, you shall be complete with God. (Devarim 18:13, Parshas Shoftim)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive mitzvah to place complete trust in Hashem (bitachon), as Scripture commands: "You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your God" (Devarim 18:13).

The Ramban enumerates this as a distinct positive commandment, requiring us not to consult astrologers or diviners regarding the future. Even if one happens to hear their astrological prognostications, he must firmly believe that the Almighty governs all events and that Hashem can annul their omens based upon our sincere devotion and spiritual service. From this foundational principle, we are commanded to trust in Hashem wholeheartedly throughout all circumstances of life, as Scripture proclaims: "Blessed is the person who trusts in Hashem, and whose trust Hashem is" (Yirmeyahu 17:7), contrasting with: "Cursed is the person who trusts in man" (Yirmeyahu 17:5). Likewise, Scripture admonishes: "Trust in Him at all times, O people" (Tehillim 62:9), and: "Trust in Hashem with all your heart, and do not rely upon your own understanding" (Mishlei 3:5).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 9)

Unreasonable, exaggerated fears (yirah shotah) rooted in a lack of bitachon stifle spiritual alacrity, constantly generating excuses to avoid learning Torah or performing mitzvos. A reliable test to determine whether a fear is genuine or merely an excuse is to ask: if this concern were resolved, would another excuse immediately arise to take its place?

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes addresses the Torah's song about the well and the distinction between the princes who first dug it and the more ordinary people who later drew it forth. The Sfas Emes answers by explaining the continuing place of nedivus, willing desire, and bitachon. A trace or residual impression of holiness survives in the individual. One does not need to pretend that the original spiritual perfection has remained intact. By trusting the Creator and resolving to strengthen the remaining trace, the person can receive help to repair what has been damaged. Only afterward may the individual grow into a fuller understanding and a more personally integrated possession of the gift. Even after spiritual stumble, bitachon banishes despair—giving a Jew the courage to trust that Hashem welcomes even the smallest sincere awakening of the heart (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Chukas 5638).

• The Sfas Emes notices a difference between Pharaoh's telling of the dream and the Torah's first account of it. Pharaoh emphasizes that the earlier plentiful cows were swallowed so completely that their presence could no longer be recognized. The Sfas Emes treats this addition as reflecting a distorted view of the apparent opposition between scarcity and plenty, misfortune and blessing. Evil, deprivation, and exile seem to consume whatever good came before them, as though the world were now governed by an alien and entirely independent force. Bitachon is thus the correction of perception: instead of treating adverse appearances as proof that Hashem has vanished, the person searches for the deeper unity that remains operative. Rather than being intimidated by surface appearances of exile, bitachon empowers a Jew to uncover the hidden Divine unity operating beneath every event (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Mikeitz 5636).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the verse 'Blessed is the man who trusts Hashem, and Hashem will be his trust' with an exceptionally strong distinction between what a person receives and the Source from which it comes. He draws on a Midrash contrasting someone who trusts idols with one who trusts Hashem. Idolatrous reliance allows the external form of a thing to become detached from the Divine vitality within it. Trust in Hashem works in the opposite direction. It strips away the illusion that a benefit or possession is independent and binds the person to the Giver who remains active within the gift. He develops several further parallels: trusting during business and ordinary weekday work can prepare for a deeper revelation on Shabbos; trusting in this life prepares the person for a life in which the Divine source is more visibly recognized. Through unwavering trust, a Jew preserves the living bond between his material blessings and their Divine Source, allowing prosperity itself to be sanctified (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5649).

• The Sfas Emes develops the story of Eliezer's devoted service to Avraham as a model of spiritual work when direct light is absent. Chazal say that by serving a righteous person faithfully Eliezer went from the status of cursed to that of blessed. The Sfas Emes extends the movement to the passage from weekdays into Shabbos and, more broadly, from exile into redemption. A person does not always inhabit the visible atmosphere of blessing. There are times when the world is spiritually dark, when the promised light cannot be felt, and when the work

required seems unglamorous. Like Eliezer walking faithfully on his mission before the outcome was visible, a Jew works diligently during the days of concealment while trusting Hashem to bring the blessing to fruition (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5652).

• In an Acharei Mos discourse the Sfas Emes begins with a Midrash on Aharon's entrance into the holy place and the words 'in this I trust.' He connects the preparation for prayer with emunah and bitachon. The Sfas Emes explains that trust transforms the intention behind those requests. One who possesses real bitachon recognizes that the whole course of life is conducted by Hashem and that Divine providence is directed toward what is genuinely best for the person. He invokes Chovos HaLevavos for this understanding. That conviction enables the heart to turn from independent attachment to each desired outcome and to seek a single deeper good: attachment to Hashem. Trust enables a person to ask earnestly without treating the requested object as a second master. When we bring our daily needs before Hashem in prayer with pure trust, every petition becomes an expression of attachment to His sustaining presence (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5654).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss all of the ways that Bitachon helps to make you into a better person
- Discuss how to develop Bitachon
- Discuss the balance between doing your hishtadlus and having bitachon

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Our Rabbis taught: Once all Israel ascended to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festival and had no water to drink. Nakdimon ben Gurion went to a wealthy Roman nobleman and said to him: 'Lend me twelve cisterns of water for the festival pilgrims, and I will either refill them for you by a set date or pay you twelve talents of silver!' When the final afternoon arrived and not a drop of rain had fallen, the nobleman sent word morning, noon, and late afternoon: 'Send me either my water or my silver!' Nakdimon replied each time: 'I still have time left in the day!' The nobleman laughed and went to the bathhouse rejoicing: 'All year long no rain has fallen—will it rain now in the final hour?' Meanwhile, Nakdimon entered the Temple, wrapped himself in his cloak, stood in prayer, and cried: 'Master of the Universe! It is revealed and known before You that I did not do this for my own honor or for the honor of my father's house, but for Your honor, so that the festival pilgrims would have water to drink!' Instantly the sky clouded over and rain poured down until all twelve cisterns were overflowing! When the nobleman stepped out of the bathhouse, he claimed: 'The sun has already set behind the clouds, so the rain fell after the deadline!' Nakdimon re-entered the Temple and prayed: 'Master of the Universe, make it known that You have beloved ones in Your world!' The clouds parted and the sun shone brightly, proving the day had not ended—and that is why he was called Nakdimon, because the sun shone (nikderah) for his sake!

Taanis 19b–20a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Shach grappled with the question of having his family leave Poland to join him in Vilna to leave to Eretz Yisrael. It was a Friday, erev Shabbos Lech Lecha, Marcheshvan, 5700 (1940), the deadline date for sending telegrams to apply for exit visas from Vilna. On that day, Rav Shach went to the post office to send a telegram to his family in Kletzk, informing them of the decision they were awaiting: were they to remain where they were or come to Vilna urgently in order to emigrate to the Holy Land? Rav Shach had already arranged a code with the Rebbetzin. If his telegram was headed with the Russian word "charosho," meaning "good," this meant the family should come to Vilna. If not, they were to remain in Kletzk. As he walked to the post office, doubts gnawed at his heart. He simply could not make up his mind. Therefore, he had prepared

two telegrams, one with the word "charosho" at the top, the other headed with the word "nyet," "no." All the way to the post office and even as he waited on line, he continued weighing the issue. The two sides struggled fiercely in his mind: how could he go to Eretz Yisrael no arrangement for a place to learn and teach, and no provision for livelihood? On the other hand, if he chose to remain under Russian rule, he and his family might be in danger. The moment of truth was drawing frighteningly close as the line ahead of Rav Shach shortened. Suddenly, he remembered that Torah portion of the week was Lech Lecha, the parshah in which Hashem commands Avraham Avinu, "Go, for your sake, from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the Land I will show you." Surely, then, he should choose to go to Eretz Yisrael! He began looking in his pocket for the telegram marked "Charasho." The last person on line ahead of him had already completed his business at the counter, The decisive moment had arrived. Rav Shach, still deep in thought, continued waiting in line, oblivious. The harsh voice of the postal clerk, scolding him for holding up the queue, broke his train of thought, and before he was fully aware of it, the impatient clerk had snatched the telegram from his hand — the one telling his family to come to Vilna for emigration to Eretz Yisrael. Swiftly, the clerk stamped it and hurried off to hand it over for transmission. And so, in a clear act of Providence, Rav Shach's lengthy inner debate was put to an abrupt end, The decision was already a fait accompli. Relating the tale years later, Rav Shach remarked? "The ways of hashgachah are marvelous. I, a poor, downtrodden man, was saved from the valley of tears, while great men of wealth such as Shereshevsky and the like found it too hard to leave their money and property behind, and they perished when the wrath of God struck. From this one may learn the depth of the concept of 'Wealth that is reserved for its owner to his detriment."

Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 384

❖ The following powerful story reveals a level of bitachon and integrity in monetary matters that almost defies the imagination. The operation was a serious one, but was considered somewhat routine. It was meant to take a certain amount of time. The time was up... but no one came out of the operating theater. The clock continued ticking... and the family began to worry. Soon, they found out that they were correct to worry! During the operation to remove his kidney, there was a complication due to human error on the part of the surgeon. It was an error that almost cost the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, his life. After the removal of a kidney, the surgeon is supposed to clamp the main artery to make sure that the blood remains where it should be. Somehow, that clamp was not properly affixed, and during the surgery it came off. In the report, the doctor wrote that as a result, there was "rapid," "brisk" arterial bleeding. Rapid and brisk arterial bleeding means that there were just twenty seconds between life and death. Baruch Hashem, the doctor succeeded in reaffixing it before the twenty seconds passed. However, after that he had to do damage control. R' Elya Meir suffered for many years from those complications. Anyone who was present in the yeshivah for Yom Kippur not long after that operation can never forget the Rosh Yeshivah's Shehecheyanu said with profoundly moving tears. When he said the words "V'chol maaminim sheHu bochein kelayos, hagoel mi'maves u'podeh mishachas... All believe that He examines thoughts (literally, kidneys), He redeems from death and ransoms from destruction," he said them with such feeling, such heartfelt tears, that the entire minyan was shaking! Later, R' Benyomin Halpern asked him, "Why didn't the Rosh Yeshivah sue the surgeon? The money the Rosh Yeshivah would have made from the settlement would have enabled the Rosh Yeshivah and his family to live comfortably!" The answer is one that still rings in R' Benyomin's ears to this day. He explained, "I asked the shver (R' Shmuel Berenbaum), and the shver told me that in order to get a large settlement, you have to prove that there was permanent damage. Proving that there was permanent damage might involve a bit of exaggeration. It is not worthwhile to take any money unless it was acquired with the utmost integrity." No settlement, no amount of money, was worth pushing the truth.

From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Harav Yechezkel Levenstein's manner in avodas Hashem was to accentuate the fear of G-d. Humor, therefore, was not his forte; even a fleeting light statement was rare. In his later years, a student once entered his study and noticed his rebbe in a most uncharacteristic, cheerful disposition. It was a remarkable sight, so much so that he gathered the courage to ask Rav Yechezkel directly regarding his unusual behavior. The rebbe answered blissfully. "Years before the war, when I was

appointed as Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe, my salary was set at a certain amount per month. It was merely a pittance, not sufficing even for basic expenses. What's more, it never arrived with any regularity, as the yeshivah's financial state was most pathetic. "How, you may wonder, did my family manage? I prayed to Hashem with sincerity that He show me His compassion and provide for my family, so that they not suffer starvation. Simultaneously, I worked hard to develop the trait of bitachon — absolute faith in Hashem. I am forever grateful to Him for having provided for my family throughout all those years. Despite our extreme poverty, we were all fed and clothed and maintained ourselves in good health. "Years passed, and during the war my family was fortunate enough to be saved from annihilation, together with the entire Mirrer Yeshivah, in Shanghai. The support of the yeshivah was entirely dependent on contributions from America, which at the time was in a state of war with Japan (which controlled Shanghai), so all money transfers had to be done circuitously. Any direct contact with the United States was considered treasonous and punishable by long prison terms. "Needless to say, our livelihood did not improve by any means; in fact, for months on end we received almost no salary at all. How did we continue to survive? Exactly as we had in Mir, with prayers and Tehillim, seasoned with the Shaar HaBitachon, the "Chapter on Reliance" [on Hashem] of the classic Chovos HaLevavos. "After the war, the Ponevezh Rav, Harav Yosef Kahaneman, invited me to join the staff of his yeshivah as Mashgiach. With his generous spirit, he offered me a hefty salary, compared to what I was earning at the time. For a long time the checks arrived promptly. "During that period of time, a gradual ebbing of my bitachon, my sole reliance on Hashem, began; a change of which I myself wasn't even aware. Slowly, gradually, I began to de-emphasize bitachon, subconsciously assuming that I was on safe ground and did not have to focus on financial sustenance in my prayers. "Of late, our yeshivah is undergoing some cash-flow problems, as a result of the massive expansion of its campus. For several months now, I haven't received a salary check. Today, during my prayers a truly beautiful thing happened to me. Suddenly, realizing my vulnerability, my mind began focusing on bitachon, and I beseeched Hashem to answer my supplications and help me support my family. Today's prayer was of the same quality as in the olden days, full of heart and soul and full of faith in Him. "Receiving back this great gift, bitachon in Hashem without any intermediaries or false assurances, is a phenomenal gift! I treasure it immensely, and that is why my spirits rose so high today!"

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Chofetz Chaim was once traveling on a train. In the railroad car was another Jew with whom he conversed throughout the trip. "Tell me please, Reb Yid," asked the Chofetz Chaim. "Do you set fixed periods of time to study Torah?" "Truthfully," answered the man, "I don't really have any time to spare, as I am a businessman, and the yoke of earning a living rests heavily upon my shoulders. From early morning until late at night I am busy with my work, and if I would not work as I do, a competitor would outdo me and impede upon my livelihood." "You are mistaken," said the Chofetz Chaim. "I will illustrate the fallacy of your words for you with a parable: A man traveled to the capital city to speak with the king's officers regarding an important matter. Seated in the railroad car, he grew impatient, as it appeared to be moving rather slowly. What did he do? He removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and with all his might, began to push the inside wall of the train... " 'What are you doing?' asked the bewildered passengers. " 'I know,' said the man, 'that when the horse hitched to my own wagon has difficulty ascending a mountain, I assist it by descending from the wagon and pushing... In this instance as well, I am pushing the car in order that it move faster.' " 'You simple villager,' laughed the passengers. 'Do you truly think that your meager strength will be sufficient to move this powerful train, all the more so, when you are sitting inside?' "So it is when it comes to one's livelihood," concluded the Chofetz Chaim. "Hashem, the King of all kings, worries about all His creations and sustains the entire world with His mercy. Do you truly think that as a result of your efforts you will increase your earnings?"

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ An avrech living in Yerushalayim came to the Brisker Rav with the following question. It was becoming increasingly difficult to support his family and he had been offered a position as a clerk in the post office. He was debating whether to accept the job because Shabbos was regularly desecrated in the post office. "I won't be forced to desecrate Shabbos but it is hard for me to consider working in a place where the holiness of Shabbos is trampled on. And so, what should I do?" Rather than relating to the main point the man presented, The Brisker Rav chose to raise a different point: "So far your whole concern is regarding chillul Shabbos; I am amazed that you do not raise the issue of bittul Torah. How can you possibly, consider leaving the beis ha-midrash and cutting yourself off from Torah?!" The young man justified himself, explaining that, thank God, he and his wife had been blessed with many children, and the monthly stipend he received from the kollel was not enough to satisfy the family. "You have bread?" Asked The Brisker Rav. "Yes," he answered. The Brisker Rav saw that he did not understand the intention of the question. "You have bread, and you have margarine [to spread on it]?!" When the man responded that he did, The Brisker Rav said, "If so, what is the question here?" One had no justification, reasoned The Brisker Rav, to leave kollel just to acquire a higher standard of living."

The Brisker Rav Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 264

❖ The Brisker Rav taught that bitachon is not just a means to an end. Although through the quality of bitachon, one can achieve all the desires of one's heart, achieving bitachon is an end in itself, as it brings a person close to his Creator. He feels that his connection with Hashem is complete and everlasting, as expressed in the pusuk, "If I had not placed myself and pictured my soul like a baby who trusts in its mother, like this baby, so my soul trusts [in Hashem], It was erev Rosh Chodesh, the day before The Brisker Rav would give out the monthly stipend to the members of his kollel, and he found that he was lacking the necessary funds. He decided to look around for someone who would lend him the money. One of those he approached commented how nice it would be if he could simply find someone to donate a quarter of a million lirot, thus resolving all his worries over the matter. The Brisker Rav answered him with conviction, "I would not accept such a sum. Would it be worth it to 'sell' my mitzvah of bitachon for a quarter of a million lirot?"

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 547

❖ It was with a heavy heart that the Yid from Chutz La'aretz picked up the phone to call the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur). His wife had been diagnosed with a very serious illness, and he was calling to discuss the matter and the best way to go about treating it. During the conversation, he told the Rebbe that his wife insisted that her illness be kept a secret at all costs. "I haven't even told her that I would be telling the Rebbe," he confided. Several days later, while at work, the telephone in the man's office rang. To his shock, it was the Rebbe himself. "I know that both you and your wife absolutely insist that news of her illness be kept a secret. Yet, I felt the need to periodically call you in the office because every person undergoing such a difficult nisayon needs someone to talk to, to unburden himself. If you keep it all in, the pain and suffering are compounded tenfold. I decided to call you in the office so you will have someone to talk to without anyone else knowing!" For the next year, as his wife underwent treatments, the Rebbe would call him every few weeks in the office to inquire about her welfare. Once on the phone, the Rebbe would infuse him with chizuk and bitachon. At the end of every conversation, the Rebbe would conclude, "Men vet noch redden—we will still speak." When the Yid would travel to Yerushalayim and enter the Rebbe's room in the beis medrash where he met with the chassidim, the first thing the Rebbe would do was ask him to close and lock the door. In this way, the person would not worry that anyone was overhearing their conversation and would feel free to talk without inhibition. On the last Taanis Esther of the Rebbe's life, two days before his passing, the Rebbe called that Yid and was mechazek him as usual. At the conclusion of the conversation, however, the Rebbe left something out. He did not say, "Men vet noch redden—we will still speak," as he always did. The chassid was left feeling unsettled. It was the first time the Rebbe had not said those words. Two days later, when the shocking news of the Rebbe's passing spread like wildfire, it hit him that during that last conversation, the Rebbe had, in essence, taken leave of him.

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A story is told about a city dweller who visited the village for the first time in his life. Looking around, he noticed a farmer plowing his field with a plow strapped to two powerful horses. He stared in amazement and could not believe what he was seeing. "Why is the farmer destroying the land?" he wondered. "And besides, how will he benefit from digging furrows in the dry earth?" His astonishment grew even more when he realized that subsequent to "destroying" the land, the farmer was now scattering wheat kernels over the surface. "This farmer must have lost his mind," thought the man to himself. Several weeks later, however, the man noticed that stalks of wheat had grown in the field. He now understood that these stalks of wheat must have been the farmer's goal from the outset. Not much time had passed, however, when the farmer went out onto the field with a sickle in hand and cut down all of the wheat he had toiled so painstakingly to grow... "This I simply cannot understand," exclaimed the man to himself. "After having labored to such a degree in order to grow these beautiful stalks of wheat — he cuts them down with a sickle?" His curiosity continued to increase until he saw the farmer load the wheat harvest onto his wagon and transport it to the mill. There it was ground into white flour and eventually baked into fresh bread. It was only then that the man understood the true intentions of the farmer! So it is with man in this world, explained the Dubno Maggid. There are times when man does not understand that which he sees, and his heart is filled with wonderment. This is due only to his lack of understanding and limited perspective. If, however, he were able to view the entire creation as a whole, he would arrive at a realization of just how extraordinary Hashem's providence truly is.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In the early 1900s, a wealthy Sephardic Jew named Silas Hardon ensconced himself into Shanghai's high society by marrying a Chinese woman, adopting numerous Chinese children and erecting Buddhist temples on his property. One night his father appeared to him in a dream and scolded, "My Silas, my Silas, you have done much for the Chinese, but what have you done for your people?" He was then awakened by a knock on the door. On the other side was Chacham Ibrahim, the rabbi of the Sephardic Shanghai community. The rabbi had come fund-soliciting and only desperation had forced him to return to a home where he had never been successful in the past. Then again, he had never previously visited after a nightmare... Hardon was more than attentive and asked the rabbi how much he needed. Chacham Ibrahim, like virtually any rabbi involved in the trade knew that if you want a little, you ask for a lot, so he articulated a gargantuan sum. Hardon took the bait, hook, line and sinker, and wrote out a check for the entire amount! Chacham Ibrahim stood there in total shock, his eyes blinking in utter disbelief. Hardon presented the check and inquired, "What are you going to do with all this money?" He had him there. The rabbi started hyperventilating, hemming and hawing until he was able to come up with, "The demographics of the Jewish community are changing. Our people are moving downtown to the more expensive real estate, and we must prepare now for then." Hardon bought the idea, quite literally, and sponsored the construction of the Beis Aharon Synagogue, a beautiful two-story structure with modern facilities, kitchen, and dining room. The building was a testimony to charity, philanthropy and chessed. A hollow testimony, however, for no one ever walked in there, aside from tourists and a minyan that was eventually hired to fill it on Shabbos. Until the Mirrer Yeshivah arrived. Suddenly everyone understood why the building had been built, for there were exactly as many seats as there were students — not one more and not one less. There were exactly as many rooms as there were married couples, not one more and not one less! The hand of God that had saved the yeshivah continued to shower miracle after miracle the entire time the Mir remained in Shanghai. What follows is a small sampling of what were typical events.

For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 52

❖ Reb Moshe Feinstein's bitachon (trust in Hashem) was evident in many ways, including the way he took responsibility for his yeshivah's financial viability. One Friday as he was about to enter the beis midrash to deliver his shiur, an administrator approached him to say that the bank manager had just called. If the yeshivah did not make a $2,000 deposit that day, its checks would not be covered. Logic dictated that Reb Moshe would immediately place a few phone calls to

raise the necessary funds. But Reb Moshe would not do this at the expense of the shiur. "Do not worry," he told the administrator, and he proceeded to the beis midrash. As he was completing the shiur some two hours later, a man who did not appear to be wealthy entered the bets midrash. He approached Reb Moshe and handed him a donation of $2,000.

Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A rich merchant's carriage once broke down just as he was hurrying to make a large delivery of merchandise. He hired a villager to bring him and his goods to the buyer in a distant town. After transferring the delicate clothing to his wagon, the villager placed uncovered food and drink for the trip near the merchandise. When the rich man protested that this posed a danger to his goods, the villager replied that he could not afford to stay at an inn, and would need to sleep and eat in the carriage. "You should have realized that if I hired you to deliver my merchandise in good condition," said the merchant, "I would obviously pay the cost of your room and meals in an inn.". The Maggid explains that the neshamah is our "merchandise." Since the Kadosh Baruch Hu gave us something so precious, He obviously doesn't want it to be ruined, and will give us whatever support is needed to keep it in good condition. There is no need to be worried about parnassah. As the Rambam explains, and as is clear in Parashas Bechukosai, Hashem will give us whatever we need to serve Him.

I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 277

❖ An embittered pauper related his tale of woe to the Chofetz Chaim. In an attempt to console him, the Chofetz Chaim told the following parable: In a certain city lived two wealthy merchants named Reuven and Shimon. On one occasion they were falsely accused of having committed a felony against the government by counterfeiting money. They were therefore incarcerated in prison — to languish there until the day of their trial. Their families tried their utmost to save them, hiring the finest lawyers in the land and even going so far as to bribe the king's officials in order to sweeten their verdict. These efforts cost the families an extraordinary sum of money and nearly depleted their assets. By the time their endeavors had concluded, Reuven was left with twenty thousand rubles, and Shimon with only two thousand. When the day of the hearing arrived, their defense attorneys stood before the judges. Reuven was represented by one of the most superb legal minds in the land, while Shimon was represented by one of the king's ministers! Seated on the defense bench, Shimon leaned over and whispered to Reuven, "Your situation is certainly better than mine! Since you have ten times as much money as I do, you will be able to resume your business activities and maybe even get rich again..." "You are mistaken," responded Reuven in an undertone. "Although you have less money than I do, you nevertheless have a better chance of being exonerated, as the king's minister is vying in your favor. Now, I may have more money than you — but who will be able to ensure that I will be found innocent?" "So it is with you," said the Chofetz Chaim to the poor man. "You may not have any money, but Hashem in all His glory is standing at your right side, as the verse states: 'For He stands at the right of the destitute, to save him from the condemners of his soul' (Tehillim 109:31). Is there anything greater than that? "Think about it for a moment," concluded the Chofetz Chaim. "What would you rather have, the money of the rich or Hashem standing at your right side?"

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Shortly before a train departs from a busy train station, said the Chofetz Chaim, it is customary for the conductor to blow a whistle. Upon hearing the whistle, crowds of people rush to take a seat on the train that will shortly depart. Yet there are others who bide their time and board the railway cars only after they hear the second whistle, which indicates that departure is imminent. By the time the third whistle has been sounded, not a passenger remains on the platform, and the train commences its journey. A simpleton errs, continued the Chofetz Chaim, by believing that the conductor who blows his whistle is the director of all the train's operations. For the truth is that he is no more than a minor official. The one who is actually in charge of the train sits in his office and dispenses orders to his subordinates. They, in turn, dispense orders to their subordinates, and so on, until word reaches the conductor who subsequently blows the whistle. So it is with this

world, concluded the Chofetz Chaim. There are those who believe that kings and officials are at its helm. The truth is, however, that there is a far superior authority, and everything is in the hands, as it were, of Hashem, the King of kings. It is He and not anyone else Who is the true controller of the world.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Imagine a child in a classroom who asks an excellent question, but in response the teacher tells him to be silent or he will be punished. Doesn't the child have the right to ask the question? When we ask why the tzaddik suffers, why does Hashem reply that we don't have a right to ask? Rav Kluger answers with a mashal. There was once a master tailor who was approached by the king to create a beautiful coat for him. The king provided the tailor with exquisite and expensive fabrics and threads. He gave him four weeks to produce the garment. At the end of four weeks, the king summoned the tailor to the palace. The tailor showed the coat to the king; all who saw it agreed that it was the most magnificent coat they had ever seen. Soon word spread of the tailor's work. Other tailors in the kingdom, who were jealous, decided to discredit the tailor. They spread a rumor that the tailor had not used all the material the king had given him for the coat, but had kept some for himself. A big commotion ensued. The king himself began to wonder if, indeed, the tailor had kept some of the fabric for his own use. By looking at the coat, it certainly was not evident whether the tailor had used all the material he had been given. The king ordered the tailor to prove that he had not taken anything for himself. Left with no choice, the tailor agreed to prove to the king that he had used all of the material. He took the coat and proceeded to tear it apart. "I can show you every thread and piece of fabric I have used in the making of this garment. But in order to do so, I have to take apart the entire coat," he explained. This, says Rav Shlomo Kluger, is the response of the Almighty. He is the Master Tailor. There is a "Master Plan" in which everything that happens in this world is accounted for. However, if we demand answers to our questions, He is going to have to transform the world back to the way it was at the very beginning of time and start again.

Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Terel Howard was an American Jew. He joined the us army and was stationed in postwar Germany. The Germans didn't know that he was Jewish and he would often hear anti-Semitic remarks from the Germans. This made him realize that things haven't changed for the Jews and he decided to move to Israel. He joined a kibutz. At the kibutz he developed a friendship with David the carpenter of the kibbutz. He had bulging muscles, but he also had a tattoo on his arm from the holocaust. Terel remembered the number because it was the last four digits of his social security number 7401. One day as they were working together Terel gathered the courage to ask David the story of how he got the number. Painfully David said that he and his family were all lined up and sequentially got a number, and the rest of his family later was killed. Terel never spoke to David about the numbers again. Later he got into a bad accident at the kibutz and lost his leg. After a while he got a job as a tour guide in Israel, and he was famous as the one legged tour guide. One day he was asked to pick up a client at the airport and take him to the hotel. The customer wore heavy gold cufflinks, smoked a Cuban cigar, and kept talking about all of his wealth. Terel discomfort at the ostentation must have become apparent. The man said I know you don't like me, but I've paid my dies. I deserve to live a comfortable life now. He rolled up his sleeve and the number was 7402. Terel was in shock. "Did you happen to have a brother named David"? The man said he did but he was killed in the war. Tuvia said he thinks he is still alive and he can take him there right now. Terel drove straight to the kibutz, and told David what he saw. David ran to the car and the two reunited. Terel was so inspired by this incident and the hashgachah that he became a baal teshuvah. He then founded the Jerusalem Institute for rehabilitation to provide for more than 25,000 amputees in Israel.

Visions of Greatness 2, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers, p. 90

❖ At times, an individual invests a tremendous amount of time and energy into his material pursuits, forgetting that man's yearly sustenance is already determined and that all his effort is in vain! This can be compared to a pair of neighbors who lived in a small village; one was a stingy miser, the other, a kind-hearted, merciful Jew. On one occasion, a visitor

arrived in the village and sought a place to spend the night. He knocked on the first door he came to — much to his misfortune, it was the door of the miser. "Please forgive me," said the visitor. "I am passing through the village and am searching for a place to rest my weary feet — perhaps I could lodge in your house?" "Lodge in my house?" shouted the miser. "Nothing is free in my home! If you wish to lodge here, you must first perform various chores around the house — only then will I permit you to spend the night." With no other choice, the visitor agreed, and the miser told him what to do. "This item needs fixing," he instructed. "Scrub over here... these vessels could certainly use a good shine and polish..." When the visitor completed his arduous labor, he approached the miser and inquired as to where he could rest his head. "Come with me," he answered, "and I will take you to my neighbor's house. He is very hospitable and will certainly allow you to lodge with him." The miser's scheme having been revealed, the visitor began to lament bitterly, "Woe is me!" he cried. "I could have come to this house initially and requested to spend the night. All of my toil was in vain!"

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The answers to the questions "What do you do?" and "What do you do for a living?" should never be synonymous in one's mind. Rabbi Mordechai Gifter is fond of saying that a person does not make living, he takes a living. The Beis Ha Levi once met a former student who had become a successful manufacturer. He asked the student, "How are you doing?" The man answered, "Baruch Hashem, Rebbe, I have a large factory and is doing quite well." The Beis HaLevi asked again, "Yes, but how are you doing?" Again the student provided a glowing account of his commercial success. Finally, the Rebbe said, "Everything you've described are things that God does for you. I want to know about the areas of life that are in your hands. How is your spiritual agenda - your davening, your learning, your giving of tzedakah? How are you doing?"

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld was always telling those around him to do only a reasonable amount of work and trust to G-d's blessings, and not to put undue effort into their livelihood. He would cite the Chofetz Chaim's parable about the oil merchant who tried to increase his revenues by adding a second spigot to his barrel, thinking that this would give him twice as much oil. Similarly, R' Chaim would point out, putting more work into one's profession than was normal would not, in the long run, increase one's total income beyond what G-d had decreed for him. On the other hand, he would explain, a person cannot sit back and expect G-d to support him without his making any effort at all. The Torah states clearly that, "Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do" (Devarim 15:18). It is incumbent upon a person to create the tools through which the blessings of G-d may operate. It is G-d's will that it is necessary for a person to open, so to speak, the faucets through which Divine Providence may flow. By undertaking the proper degree of effort, a person strengthens his bond to his Creator, by placing himself in a position where he must constantly hope and trust to G-d that his efforts succeed. But under no circumstances should a person take away time from learning and davening for his parnasah. Since prosperity comes from Hashem's blessing how can he think that Hashem will reward him by showing a lack of gratitude by minimizing his Torah study and prayer.

Guardian of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 181

❖ The Satmar Rav's first priority was to open a yeshivah to educate the bochurim among the orphan refugees. Appealing to activists and fundraisers in Jerusalem, the Rebbe explained the necessity for money to support this new yeshivah. One such activist asked respectfully, "Until now, whenever we did something for the public good, we funded it with money raised from European Jews. Now that Europe has gone up in smoke, and the few Jews left there do not have the means to help, where will the Rebbe get the money for such an ambitious project?" The Rebbe replied, "The posuk says (Tehillim 146:3): 'Do not trust in rich people, in man who has no salvation.' The Divrei Chaim read it differently: 'In a man who has nothing, where is salvation.' Hashem Yisborach will help and our support will come from those who have no money.

The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, By Rabbi Dovid Meisels, p. 127

❖ A talmid chacham who was a regular member of Rav Elyashiv's shiur fell ill with cancer, and his doctors said that this form of the disease was incurable. The sick man and his wife decided to consult with Rabbi Benny Fisher, the renowned medical referral expert and he advised them to fly to the United States and see a specialist. "I'm prepared to go to America, of course," the man's wife told Rabbi Fisher, "but I would very much like to discuss the situation with Rav Elyashiv before we go." Rabbi Fisher arranged a visit for the couple at Rav Elyashiv's home on a Friday, several hours before Shabbos. When Rav Elyashiv saw the medical documents he too realized that according to natural means, there was no hope for the patient to recover — with or without the trip to America. He did not attempt to conceal this information, but rather said, "The only thing I can do is bless you and pray to Hashem that He send you a complete recovery." The visit seemed to have ended with that, but the woman suddenly stood up and said, "The way it appears now, I will be a widow in a short time r"l. I accept Hashem's decree upon myself with total love, but I wish to ask a small question. "I will not be left alone, for my husband will leave me with a house full of many orphans, young and old. These children will grow and in a few years they will ask me, 'Ima, did you do everything possible so that Abba could remain alive?' My question is, does the Rav feel that I can look them in the eye and say that I truly did everything for their father?" Hearing these words, Rav Elyashiv turned to Rabbi Fisher and said, "You are going to travel now with this couple to the specialist in America." He repeated, "Now!" Rabbi Fisher was flabbergasted. "It's Friday," he said. "Does the Rav mean that I should travel with the patient today, in desecration of Shabbos, or should we wait until Sunday?" Rabbi Fisher was sure that he had not understood Rav Elyashiv correctly, especially considering that several moments earlier, Rav Elyashiv had said, "The only thing I can do is bless you and pray to Hashem that He send you a complete recovery." But Rav Elyashiv reiterated, "I said you should travel now, on Friday." Rabbi Fisher flew with the patient to see this specialist, and after several treatments, the man returned home to Yerushalayim, as healthy as ever, and rejoined Rav Elyashiv's shiur. R' Avraham Broide, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Tiferes Mordechai Yeshivah, posed a question to R' Chaim Kanievsky regarding the above story. "How can it be that Rav Elyashiv changed his mind so quickly and dramatically, to the point that he instructed them to fly to chutz laaretz on Shabbos?" "Apparently," replied R' Chaim, "he saw from the woman's words that she possessed extraordinary emunah and bitachon, and he realized that when she said that she was accepting the decree upon herself with love, she meant fully. When someone is on such a great level of emunah and bitachon, he has the power to tear up his decree in Heaven, and in such a case it is even permitted to violate Shabbos."

Rav Elyashiv, By Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 417

❖ A man was fired from his job after having served loyally in his position for many years. One day, he phoned the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, to seek his advice regarding a job offer. The opportunity seemed promising, but his pursuit of it was likely to lead to squabbling among a number of parties. The Rosh Yeshivah advised against pursuing the offer. The man was upset. "But I have no job..." he moaned. The Rosh Yeshivah encouraged the man to place his trust in Hashem, and conferred his blessings. Soon after, the business in which the man had been offered a position collapsed, while he became a partner in a successful carpet business. One day, the man was escorting the Rosh Yeshivah somewhere when they passed by a hotel. The sidewalk was piled high with worn carpets which had obviously just been replaced. "Oy!" the man exclaimed. "New carpets for a hotel! Another order that did n't come my way!" The Rosh Yeshivah was not pleased with the remark. "Where is your bitachon?" he demanded. "Whatever earnings Heaven has decreed for you will surely come your way. And what right do you have to complain? You have a son and sons-in-law who have all dedicated themselves to the study of Torah. What more could a person want?" A stranger nearby overheard this conversation. He approached them and introduced himself as a real estate investor whose enterprises sometimes required the purchase and installation of carpets. The Rosh Yeshivah's companion gave the-man his business card. Eight months later the investor called to say that he had purchased a huge tract of land near a train station and would be needing carpeting for the many stores and offices which he planned to build there.

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Bassi put the two grocery bags on the kitchen table and then placed two year old Duvy in his playpen. She went back to the car to get some more bags. When she came back up the steps, she noticed the heavy front door had slammed shut, locking her out. She was frantic. Duvy was in there alone. She had put him in the playpen, but lately he'd been trying to climb out. What if he got out? Already panicky, she started banging on the door and ramming it with her shoulder, but nothing helped. She wanted to call Hatzala, but her cell phone was in the bag on the table. Her neighbors the Wolfs were out of town, and the Gelbs were at work. Just then, the mailman arrived and handed her a large manila envelope. She took it mechanically, her mind still focused on the problem at hand. She was about to ask the mailman for assistance when a key fell out of the envelope. She couldn't believe it! It was a key to her house. No, the mailman wasn't Eliyahu Hanavi. She opened the door, and then read the note in the envelope. "I was a guest at your home for Shabbos about five weeks ago," it said. "When I left, I forgot to give back the key you'd let me use. Thanks for a great Shabbos. Noam Fleegle."

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ Some people have the special ability to remain eternally young, always optimistic and hopeful. The Ponevezher Rav (R' Yosef Kahaneman) escaped from the impending Nazi inferno and later went to Israel, where he immediately began planning to rebuild the Torah glory of his town. Standing on a hill in Bnei Brak (present-day site of the Ponevezher Yeshivah), he declared his intention to build a yeshivah. German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's army was knocking on the gates of Palestine at that time, and the prospect of building a new yeshivah seemed impossible, even insane. Skeptical bystanders said to him" Rebbe, you are dreaming." He replied, "You are right, I am dreaming — but I do not sleep."

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rebbetzin Henny Machlis was renowned for her extreme hospitality, generosity and kindness. Rebbetzin Henny's mechutan once related the following beautiful incident. When Yaakov and Leah became engaged, the four parents went out to have the conversation about who would pay for what. We agreed to pay for half of the wedding. It was a short engagement of just five weeks. A couple of weeks in, I realized that the wedding hall they were looking at was huge, and our half of its cost would be way beyond our budget. I called Henny and told her that our concept of a "normal" size wedding was different from theirs. I did not know what to do, because I didn't want to cause any problem in the shalom between us. I asked, "Why do we need such a big hall?" Henny replied, "We really need to invite a lot of people." I knew that they do amazing hachnasas orchim, but I did not realize that they extend it to every aspect of their lives. So I said, "Well, the last couple weddings we made we had a total of 300-400 people, and that's what I was expecting. What are you expecting?" Henny said, "We have to be prepared for the possibility that there will be closer to 1,000." I really wasn't sure what to do. We couldn't afford to pay for 500 people. I asked, "Would you be comfortable if I asked a Rav what to do?" Henny was completely agreeable. She said that whatever the Rav says, they'll be fine with that. The Rav said that whatever is the normal amount that we'd invite is what we are obligated to pay for. I called Henny back and told her. She said, "I'm 100 percent okay with that." She asked how much that would be. I told her that we'd pay for the 200 guests that we'd invite. She said, "That will help so much." Instead of making me feel that I wasn't holding up my end of the bargain, she thanked me for whatever I was giving to help pay for the wedding. A week and a half before the wedding, Henny called me. She said, "I was thinking about the wedding, and we're going to invite a lot of people. And after the wedding, through the grapevine, everyone you know will hear that your son got married and that there were 1,000 people at the wedding. And I don't want you to be walking down the street and see someone you know and feel bad that they weren't invited to the wedding when they know there were 1,000 people there. So I just want you to know that Mordechai and I feel very strongly that anybody and everybody you would want to invite, you should invite, and don't worry about the numbers or the money. You pay for 200, and we'll pay for the rest." I was dumbfounded. I asked, "Are you sure you want to take that on?" Henny replied, "Hashem is big. He can pay for whatever."

From Emunah With Love and Chicken Soup, By Sara Yocheved Rigler, Published by Shaar Press

❖ There was a holocaust survivor named Menashe Hakatan. He wrote a haggadah and wrote this story in his haggadah. He was first interned in Auschwitz he was given the number 8274. Later he was transferred to Birkenau. There he got a new number 121926. He studied the two numbers and realized that the total of both is 21. The same number as eh-yeh. Which means Hashem said he will be with us in that tzara and every tzara. Those numbers gave him the strength to survive the war and rebuild his life after the war, and raise a beautiful family and eventually write a Hagadda.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 167

❖ "We are now beginning our descent into the Atlanta airport. Please fasten your seatbelts." Chaim Finera checked his seatbelt and luggage, then sat back in his seat. The young man had just started a promising job with a telecommunications company, and a large part of his work involved traveling to various parts of the country for sales trips and meetings. Since Chaim had an appointment in Atlanta on Monday morning, he had taken a Sunday afternoon flight. His plan was to stay over in a Holiday Inn for the night so he could get a fresh start on Monday morning. The plane landed uneventfully, and Chaim made his way over to the motel. "Here you go, Mr. Finer. Room 11A is just down the hall, on the ground floor." Chaim settled down and tried to get some sleep. But the longer he tried, the more restless he became. He tossed from side to side, trying to get comfortable, but he just couldn't fall asleep. Finally, out of sheer exhaustion, he managed to doze off. The ringing of the phone jerked Chaim awake. "What's going on?" he mumbled, still half asleep. He reached for the phone. "Yes, hello?" "Mr. Finer?" "Yes, speaking." "This is the front desk. A package was just delivered here for you." "What? No, it must be a mistake. Forget it," Chaim mumbled, hanging up the phone. Chaim turned over and immediately dozed off. But two minutes later, the phone rang again. "Mr. Finer, this is the desk again. Please come now to take your package." Now Chaim was wide awake. And he was annoyed. "What's going on? I'm not taking any package now. It's the middle of the night!" Chaim banged the phone down. Sure enough, it rang again. "Please come get your package now, Mr. Finer." Chaim sighed. What was the matter with that clerk? Couldn't it have waited until the morning? Well, it was already three o'clock, and he was wide awake. "I may as well go and get the package," he grumbled. Throwing on some clothes, Chaim stumbled out into the hall and made his way over to the front desk. The entire lobby was deserted at this late hour. The clerk was sitting behind his desk, reading a newspaper. "Okay, I'm Finer," Chaim snapped. "Where's this important package?" The clerk looked up, startled. "Excuse me, sir? Was there something you wanted?" "Yes, the package!" Chaim said impatiently. "You've been calling and telling me about the package, and I came to get it." The clerk looked bewildered. "I don't know what you're talking about, sir. I don't know about any package here for you, and I certainly haven't been calling anyone." Now it was Chaim's turn to look puzzled. Had he dreamed the whole thing? But it had felt so real. And he certainly wasn't walking in his sleep now! No, he definitely had talked to someone on the phone. Who could have called him in the middle of the night? A sudden loud crash down the hall made both men jump. Scores of screaming people began running out of their rooms. "What's going on?" Chaim yelled. He and the clerk joined the crowd, pushing their way down the hallway to see what was happening. Chaim finally broke through the crowd. He was standing at the door to his room or rather, at what used to be his room. Now, two of the walls were barely standing, while a third wall had been demolished completely. And there was a wreckage of metal and machinery strewn across the floor, plowing into Chaim's bed, right where he had been sleeping just a few minutes earlier. Slowly, the story came out. A guest at the hotel had spent the night drinking more than what was good for him. Coming home in a highly intoxicated state, the man had lost control of his car, which had crashed through the wall of the motel, straight into Chaim's bedroom. Chaim simply couldn't believe it. He whispered a silent thanks to Hashem for the tremendous hashgachah he had just experienced. And Chaim wasn't the only one who understood what had happened. As he raised his eyes, Chaim noticed that the clerk, too, was overcome by what had just transpired. He was staring at Chaim, a look of awe on his face. When Chaim returned home and related the story to his former rosh yeshivah, his Rosh Yeshivah remarked, "I'm not enough of a chassid to tell you that you had a revelation of Eliyohu Hanavi. But..."

Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers

❖ After the Yeshivah in Maltch, which was headed by Reb Zalman Sender Shapiro, closed due to the infiltration of Zionist ideologies, some of the bochurim turned to Reb Shimon Shkop and asked him to restart the Yeshivah. Reb Shimon agreed and reopened it. On his way to Maltch, even though he passed through Brisk, he didn't visit his Rebbe, Reb Chaim Soloveitchik. This was likely because he feared Reb Chaim might try to dissuade him from going. However, on his way back from Maltch, Reb Shimon did stop by Reb Chaim, who posed an intriguing question. The Parshah begins with "Vayehi miketz sh'natayim yamim." The Medrash Rabba explains that Yosef was punished with an additional two years in prison because he relied on the Sar Hamashkim (chief cupbearer) with two words, Z'chartani ("remember me") and Hizcartani ("mention me"). Reb Chaim asked Reb Shimon: "If Yosef had only said one word, how many additional years would he have needed to remain in prison?" Reb Shimon answered, "One year." But Reb Chaim explained that if Yosef had only said one word, he wouldn't have needed to remain in prison any longer. This was because one word would have been considered appropriate hishtadlus (effort). However, saying two words indicated an excessive reliance on human intervention, revealing that even his initial effort was flawed. Therefore, Yosef was punished with an additional two years -- one year for each word. Perhaps Reb Chaim shared this insight with Reb Shimon because he sensed that Reb Shimon's decision to take the position in Maltch was influenced by financial difficulties. Reb Chaim's message was that while proper hishtadlus is legitimate, excessive hishtadlus is misguided. One must always discern what falls within the bounds of hishtadlus and what lies outside of it.

As told by Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld

❖ An Iraqi terrorist, Kaiy Rahnaiet, sent off a letter bomb, but he did not pay enough postage. It came back to him with return-to sender stamped on it. Not recognizing his own envelope, he opened it up and the bomb blew up in his face.

Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

A. NOT TO ATTRIBUTE ONE'S SUCCESS TO ONE'S TALENTS RATHER THAN TO HASHEM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-14

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must trust in Hashem with all his heart and never attribute his success solely to his own wisdom, talents, or personal prowess, as Scripture warns: "Trust in Hashem with all your heart, and do not rely upon your own understanding" (Mishlei 3:5), and cautions against declaring: "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth" (Devarim 8:17).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ “It is a tree of life to those who grasp it” (Mishlei 3:18). Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Binyamin: This may be compared to a King who told his son: “My son, go out into the world on a commercial journey to trade!” His son said to him: “Father, I am afraid of the dangers of the road and of the highway bandits who ambush travelers!” What did the King do? Rather than locking his son inside the palace, he took a sturdy walking staff, hollowed out its center, and sealed a proven, royal protective amulet inside the staff. He placed the staff into his son’s hand and said: “My son, as long as this walking staff remains in your hand as you travel, you will never need to fear any bandit or creature on earth!” So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: “My children, occupy yourselves with the Torah as you walk through the world, and you will not need to fear any creature!” Notice that if the verse had said, “It is a tree of life only to those who toil in it,” the world could not have endured; rather, it says: “It is a tree of life to those who grasp and support it” (Mishlei 3:18). And had

the Torah said, “Cursed be the man who does not study all the Torah,” the world could not have endured; rather, it says: “Cursed be the one who does not uphold the words of this Torah” (Devarim 27:26) — teaching that both the scholar who studies Torah and the merchant who grasps and supports Torah hold the King’s protective staff in their hands!

Yalkut Shimoni on Mishlei 934:4 (cf. Midrash Mishlei 3:18)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi David Ashear related the following beautiful story: There was a Jewish boy who was conscripted into the Polish Army during World War I. His parents were devastated, understanding that both his physical and spiritual future were in danger. They went to the Chafetz Chaim to ask for a blessing that their son would be saved from the draft. After a few moments of silence, the great sage said, "What would be so bad if he learned how to shoot a gun?" The parents were stunned. It sounded as if the Rabbi was cursing their son, suggesting he should be conscripted and taught how to fight. They decided to bribe the doctor who conducted the medical evaluations of the conscripts, asking him to write a negative report about the boy's condition. Right after the examination, just as the doctor completed the false report describing the boy as unfit for the military, a general entered and caught them. The general announced that the boy should be placed in his own division, where he would be in charge of assembling machine guns under live fire. And so, the boy went into the army and learned how to assemble and use guns. He ended up surviving the war, and several decades later, during World War II, he found himself in the Warsaw Ghetto. He managed to escape from the ghetto with a group of friends, and they ran deep into the woods, where they met a band of partisans. The Jews offered to join the partisans to fight against the Germans, but the partisans were also anti-Semites and threatened to kill the Jews. Just then, the man who had served in the Polish Army spoke up. "I can really help you," he said. "You see that broken machine gun on the ground? I can fix it and hit any target." "O.K." they said, "let's see." He proceeded to fix the gun and then shot an apple from a distant tree, dividing it into quarters. The partisans were very impressed, and this is how that man and his friends were saved. For the rest of his life, he remembered the words spoken by the Chafetz Chaim: "What would be so bad if he learned how to shoot a gun?" This remark, which initially sounded like a dreadful curse, actually foretold the way Hashem would save this young man's life.

Table Talk, Edition 405 (Parshas Shoftim), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

B. TO BE MINDFUL, NOT TO WORRY TODAY ABOUT TOMORROW'S PROBLEM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-15

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should train himself not to be consumed by anxiety today over tomorrow's potential troubles, as Chazal taught: "Do not distress yourself over the worry of tomorrow, for you do not know what today will bring forth" (Sanhedrin 100b; cf. Mishlei 27:1); tomorrow may arrive and find that the anticipated sorrow never materialized, leaving one to have grieved in vain over a world that was not his.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred involving Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta, who arrived at Erev Shabbos at nightfall and had nothing from which to eat. He went outside the city and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He. Immediately, a precious gemstone was given to him from Heaven. He entered the town, brought it to a moneychanger, and provided for the needs of Shabbos. On Friday night, he sat and ate. His wife said to him: 'From where did these come?' He said to her: 'From what the Holy One, blessed be He, provided.' She said to him: 'If you do not tell me, I will not taste anything until you tell me!'

He told her: 'Such-and-such occurred: I prayed, and a precious stone was given to me from Heaven, and from it these were purchased.' She said to him: 'I will not taste anything until you promise me that you will return it at the conclusion of Shabbos!' He asked her: 'Why?' She replied: 'Tomorrow, when you arrive in the World to Come and your companions are with you, they will receive more and you will receive less than them! For the reward of Torah is given only in the World to Come, as it is stated: "And she laughs at the final day" (Mishlei 31:25).' When the Shabbos departed, Rabbi Shimon arose and returned the stone, and immediately it was taken back to Heaven.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Pekudei 7:3

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky once shared the following story. I'm sure you've had days when Murphy's Law is in full swing. Anything that can go wrong, does. These are days when we realize we would have been better off pulling the covers over our heads and staying in bed till four in the afternoon. I had a morning like that in Manhattan. Flat tire, stopped by a police officer for driving ten miles above the limit, not finding an open parking lot, and so on. By noon I was fit to be tied. I felt that the only thing that could get me out of the quicksand was an AA meeting. A call to the local AA office produced no less than four meetings within a six-block radius. At the meeting I attended, the speaker was a young woman of thirty-five. She had started drinking at twelve and drugs at fifteen. This led to delinquent, decadent behavior. In spite of suffering the consequences of living on the street, she was a slave to her drug addiction. At twenty six she found her way to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and at that time she was nine years clean and sober. I had heard similar stories countless times, and this one did little for me. But I have never been to a meeting in which I didn't take away something of help. What I took away from this meeting has served me well for the rest of my life. Toward the end of her talk, the woman said, "I must tell you something else before I finish. I am an avid football fan, a Jets fan. I never miss watching a Jets game." One weekend I had to be away, so I asked a friend to record the game on her VCR. When I returned, she handed me the tape and said, 'By the way, the Jets won. "I started watching the tape, and it was just horrible. The Jets were being mauled. At halftime they were behind by twenty points. Under other circumstances, I would-have been a nervous wreck. I would have been pacing the floor and hitting the refrigerator. But I was perfectly calm, because I knew they were going to win. The young woman turned to the group and concluded: Ever since I turned my life over to G-d, I no longer get uptight when things don't go my way. Just like the video of the Jets, I may be twenty points behind at halftime, but I know it's going to turn out okay in the end." This incident has helped me overcome many difficult times.

From The Rabbi and The Nuns By Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky, Published by Mekor Press

C. TO NEVER GIVE UP HOPE THAT HASHEM WILL HELP YOU

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-31

As it says, "If you say in your hearts, 'These nations are many,' do not fear them" (Devarim 7:17, Parshas Eikev).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture cautions: "If you should say in your heart: 'These nations are more numerous than I, how can I dispossess them?' You shall not be afraid of them" (Devarim 7:17–18), and further states: "When you go out to battle against your enemy and see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, do not fear them" (Devarim 20:1). We are admonished through these verses that even if a person sees impending calamity standing

directly before him, he must never despair of Hashem's boundless compassion — for as Chazal taught, even if a sharp sword rests upon a person's neck, he should never withhold himself from seeking Divine mercy, but should continuously anticipate the salvation of Hashem.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man placed money intended for his travel ticket in a desk drawer. A sudden fire broke out in the room, and remarkably, only the money set aside for the travel ticket was consumed by the flames while everything else in the drawer remained untouched. The man interpreted this as a divine omen that he should cancel his journey. Does interpreting such an event violate the biblical prohibition of Nichush (divination and omens)?

Answer: Analyzing the prohibition of nichush (superstitious omens, Yoreh De'ah 179:1) alongside the Gemara in Moed Katan (16a) and Bava Metzia (27b), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein explains that while ordinary coincidences may not be treated as omens, when a truly wondrous anomaly occurs — such as a fire in a closed drawer that burns only the plane ticket while leaving everything else untouched — one is permitted to take it to heart as a heavenly hint (remez min ha-Shamayim) without stating 'because the ticket burned I will not travel,' and instead delay the flight out of general prudence.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Metzia, p. 120

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were traveling on the road and heard the roar of the crowds of Rome from a hundred and twenty miles away; the three sages wept while Rabbi Akiva laughed, saying: 'If for those who transgress His will it is thus, how much more so for those who fulfill His will!' Another time they were ascending to Jerusalem; when they reached Mount Scopus, they tore their garments, and when they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the site of the Holy of Holies. The three sages began to weep, while Rabbi Akiva laughed. They asked him: 'Why are you laughing?' He asked them: 'And why are you weeping?' They said to him: 'Regarding the place of which it is written The stranger who approaches shall die, now foxes walk through it—and should we not weep?!' Rabbi Akiva replied: 'That is the very reason I am laughing! For the Torah explicitly linked the prophecy of Uriah—Zion shall be plowed as a field—with the prophecy of Zechariah—Old men and old women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem! Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, I feared that the prophecy of Zechariah might not be fulfilled; now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy of rebuilding will be fulfilled!' In that moment they said to him: 'Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!'

Makkos 24a–24b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Zevy Golumbek shared the following beautiful story: Reb Avraham was very close to the Telshe Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Chaim Stein. One time, his grandfather went to the doctor because he wasn't feeling well. The doctors diagnosed him with cancer in the pancreas and told him, "There's nothing we can do for you. Your days are numbered." Reb Avraham, heartbroken by what he heard, went to the Rosh Yeshivah and said, "Rav Chaim, the doctor just said that they found yenneh machlah (cancer) in my father's pancreas, and there's nothing they can do." Rav Chaim replied, "These doctors don't know what they're talking about. Don't be nispoel. It's lo hayah v'lo nivra, it never happened." Shortly afterward, they discovered that indeed the doctors had made a mistake -- he did not have yenneh machlah in the pancreas -- and he was zocheh to a refuah sheleimah. A short while later, the Landau family from Cleveland shared the following remarkable story they experienced with Rav Chaim Stein. The Landaus' daughter was expecting a baby. The doctor performed a sonogram

and saw that the baby was not going to be healthy. The baby was diagnosed with Down syndrome among several other medical conditions. The parents, heartbroken by the news, went to Rav Chaim Stein and reported to him the doctor's diagnosis. Upon hearing the situation, Rav Chaim Stein told the parents, "Accept upon yourselves the following two things, and you will see a miraculous deliverance. Accept upon yourselves to strengthen your emunah and bitachon (trust and reliance upon Hashem), and also accept upon yourselves to always be b'simchah, to be happy no matter what comes your way. If you accept these two things, you will see tremendous yeshuos." That's exactly what the parents did throughout the duration of the pregnancy. They strengthened their bitachon, their emunah, and their simchah. Sure enough, after nine months, the baby was born 100% healthy -- without a trace of any medical condition. After their child was born, they went back to Rav Chaim Stein and asked, "Is it possible that maybe the doctors made a mistake?" The Rosh Yeshivah replied, "No, no, no. The doctors knew exactly what they were talking about. There was no mistake. Your koach of emunah and bitachon changed the status of the baby. Bitachon made it so that the baby became 100% healthy. Never, ever underestimate the power of what emunah and bitachon can accomplish." In contrast to the first story, these doctors made no mistake. But emunah and bitachon were able to change reality.

Table Talk, Edition 440 (Parshas Acharei Mos Kedoshim), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ In the last hours of Rav Alpert's life, when he was too weak to speak or even to move his limbs, a student tried to communicate with him by reciting the aleph-beis and watching the Rav's reaction to any particular letter. His loving family, students, congregants and Jews the world over longed for one final message, one word to help them carry on in a world that would be so empty and dark after his departure. The Rav found the strength to comply. At the letter "beis" he gave a sign; again at the letter "tes.". There was no reaction to any other letter, but the student felt certain that his Rav wanted to convey something of import, so he did not give up. He went through the alphabet one more time. Now at "ches" another flutter was perceived, and at "nun" Rav Alpert made his last voluntary movement.

Sunset, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

❖ Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky related the following beautiful story about his father, Rav Yackov Yisrael Twerski: During World War II, one of the families in our synagogue received word that their son was missing in action in the European theater. Needless to say, the family was devastated, assuming the very worst. My father, who was the Rav of the synagogue encouraged them never to abandon hope. He insisted that their son was alive and that he was a prisoner of war and would return one day. He used to visit the family every week to uplift their spirits. After the war was over, the son did indeed return, having been a prisoner of war. When he returned to his army base, he found a stack of letters from my father, who had written to him every week. I am certain that my father wrote these letters prior to making his weekly visit to the family, to reinforce his own hope and faith that their son was alive, because his effort to keep the family's hopes high could be effective only if he believed in what he was telling them. That is an important psychological insight. You cannot convince someone of something that you do not fully believe yourself.

From The Rabbi and The Nuns By Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky, Published by Mekor Press

D. NOT TO TRY TO FIND OUT THE FUTURE AND SECRETS THROUGH THE FOLLOWING OCCULT PRACTICES:

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Akiva had a daughter, and the Chaldean astrologers told him that on the very day she would enter the wedding canopy (chuppah), a snake would bite her and she would die. Rabbi Akiva was deeply worried about this. On her wedding night, she took off her decorative golden hairpin (machbeina) and stuck it into the mud-brick wall to hold it. By divine providence, the sharp pin pierced right through the eye of a venomous snake hiding inside the wall! The next morning,

when she pulled her hairpin out of the wall, the dead snake came dragging out right behind it. Rabbi Akiva asked her: 'What special deed did you do last night?' She replied: 'In the evening, a poor man came to the door crying out for food, and everyone inside was so busy with the wedding banquet that nobody heard him. So I stood up, took the bridal portion that you gave me, and gave it to him.' Rabbi Akiva stepped out and publicly expounded: 'Not only does charity save a person from an unnatural death — it saves from death itself ('Utzedakah tatzil mi-mavet'), proving that Ein Mazal L'Yisrael (Israel is not bound by astrological fate)!'

Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 156b (312:4–5)

E. NOT TO PERFORM NACHESH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 165

As the Torah says, neither shall you practice augury (Vayikra 19:26, Parshas Kedoshim).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to see events as bad luck omens and not do something because of the bad omen?
- if someone is not sure whether he should do a certain activity, can they use some unrelated event as a determining factor?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition refers to practicing divination and superstitious augury (nichush), such as those who declare: "My bread fell from my mouth," or "My walking staff fell from my hand, therefore I will not travel to that destination today";

Or one who establishes arbitrary superstitious omens for himself, saying: "If such-and-such an occurrence happens to me, I will proceed, and if not, I will refrain."

If a person alters his conduct or performs an action guided by such superstitious divination, he violates this biblical negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means for us to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, He isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the

world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 249)

We are to put our trust in Hashem alone, not in these sign. These signs don't mean anything.

RAMBAN

A person may think that these oracles are gods and begin to worship them instead of Hashem.

RABBEINU BACHYA

People who turn to practitioners of oracles are generally mentally insecure. These people can be easily taken advantage of and be induced to do immoral things for the practitioner's nefarious purposes.

ALSHICH

Two types of people turn to oracles. One who does not believe that Hashem is concerned with the particular needs of individuals, and so he does not put his trust in Hashem. And two, one who has experienced misfortune even though he thinks that he is righteous.

To the first type of person, the Torah wants to teach that Hashem does indeed care for each individual. To the second type, the Torah wants him to stop complaining and instead reexamine his deeds. Maybe there is a way to improve himself.

SFAS EMES

• Rashi's comment on 'You shall be wholehearted' (tamim tihyeh) captures the whole mitzvah in a single phrase: look expectantly to Him, and do not investigate the future — and then you will be with Him and to His portion. The Sfas Emes gives the deep reason: Hashem brought us into the worst of places, where idolatry and sorcery were most widespread, precisely so that — knowing all of it — we would annul all those wisdoms in order to cleave to Him. That is the meaning of Chazal's rule: you may not perform these things, but you may learn in order to understand and to teach. The heart of the lesson is clear: nichush is the refusal to complete this path — it clings to the probing stage and never makes the bittul; temimus is the courage to wait for Him instead of interrogating the future (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5643).

• In Shoftim (5656), the Sfas Emes explains the demand "You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your God" through a precise account of the two levels within the human being. The body is formed from the elements of nature; the higher soul (neshamah) is a divine portion from Above (cheilek Elokai mi-ma'al). Both are present, but they do not necessarily direct a person in the same way. The purpose of Torah is to attach the lower part to its higher spiritual root (shoresh). The Sfas Emes calls this becoming "to be the head and not the tail" (le-rosh ve-lo le-zanav): relating to the head or source rather than to the tail, the last and most external stage of creation. His concluding formulation reveals the positive aim of avoiding superstitious omen-reading (nichush): the integrity

of an uninterrupted attachment to the Source. Whenever we refuse to govern our lives by superstitious omens, we elevate our soul above the blind forces of nature and cleave directly to our Creator (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5656).

• A striking question arises when we read Bil'am's blessing: the great diviner of the nations looks at Israel and declares there is no divining in Yaakov. Chazal in Nedarim read this as a promise to the one who himself abstains: whoever does not practice divination is brought into a chamber that even the ministering angels cannot enter. Why should mere abstention from omens purchase the highest revelation? The Sfas Emes turns the gemara into the taam of the mitzvah: it is measure for measure. The one who refuses to probe with his own intellect, and instead believes in the governance of the Creator — to him everything is revealed from Heaven. For Israel it is written, "For there is no divination in Yaakov" (lo nachash be-Yaakov), and therefore "What God has wrought!" (mah pa'al El) is revealed to them in the inner governance (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5652).

• The Sfas Emes reads the prohibition of superstitious omen-reading (nichush) as part of an ordered contrast between the directions in which a person may seek spiritual knowledge. His starting point is the Midrash in Emor that places side by side necromancy or spirit-divination (ov o yidoni) with the holiness of the kohanim. Why should the subjects of occult inquiry and priestly purity be read together? They represent opposing ways of relating to the very same created world. The Sfas Emes describes the fallen forms of knowledge as connected to the mixture of good and evil that entered creation after Adam's sin. On this reading, the mitzvah guards the holiness of physical deed (ma'aseh) itself by directing worldly action back to its Divine root. By refraining from superstitious omen-reading in our daily actions and instead revering Hashem's Sanctuary, we direct the entire world of action back to its holy root (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5651).

• Reflecting on the encounter between Bil'am and the angel, the Sfas Emes uncovers a timeless truth about Jewish destiny. What do the festivals have to do with the impossibility of destroying Israel? He answers that sanctification of time demonstrates the unusual position of Klal Yisrael relative to time itself. Bilam's knowledge works through an individual's astrological fortune (mazal), taking account of failings past or future as openings through which his curse might attach. The Sfas Emes calls this specifically "the superstitious divination of that wicked one (Bil'am)." The Sfas Emes explains that the key lies therefore oriented toward the timing of a vulnerability within the lower natural order. Because Klal Yisrael cleaves directly to Hashem above the calculations of time and mazal, no superstitious omen or curse can prevail against them (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5654).

F. NOT TO PERFORM ONEN

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 166

As the Torah says, nor shall you conjure (Vayikra 19:26, Parshas Kedoshim).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to see certain times of the year as times of good luck?
- Is it permitted to use horoscopes to make decisions?
- Is it permitted to claim to perform acts of sorcery, by performing illusions?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition applies, for example, to those who designate auspicious seasons and times based on astrology (me'onen), asserting: "A particular day or a specific month is favorable to initiate this undertaking," or conversely, "That day is unpropitious, therefore do not begin."

Whoever regulates his activities or performs an action in reliance upon the declarations of such astrologers violates this biblical negative commandment.

Likewise, someone who creates optical illusions and deceptive sleight of hand (achizas einayim) — making it appear to onlookers that he is performing supernatural wonders when in reality he has done nothing miraculous — violates this prohibition, as this deceptive trickery is included under the biblical category of me'onen.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes develops the Midrash on Sarah's complete years ("a hundred years and twenty years and seven years"). The question is how a human being's spiritual wholeness can also characterize the years through which that person lives. He answers by treating time itself as part of avodas Hashem. The Creator continually renews the days, and the spiritual condition of a generation influences how those days become manifest. Tzaddikim do far more than endure time. They raise its natural life to the higher source from which it comes. In this context the Sfas Emes explicitly cites "You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your God" and contrasts the other nations, which listen to soothsayers (me'onenim) because they remain bound to the calculations of nature. The existence of real wisdom within nature is acknowledged. Just as Sarah Imeinu and the Avos elevated every hour of their lives into equal goodness through righteousness, a Jew who walks with Hashem rises above astrological calculations of time (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5649).

• The Sfas Emes explicitly interprets the prohibition of astrological hour-calculating (onenos) as an error in the treatment of time: he is doing far more than observing that a diviner speaks about hours and days. His point is that the Torah distinguishes two possible directions for the human encounter with time. Time can be read as an

independent natural power that determines what will prosper. Or time can be sanctified as a place where one recognizes the higher source (makor) of holiness. The wider maamar traces the degraded forms of knowledge to the admixture of good and evil following Adam's sin. By observing Shabbos, a Jew raises time (zeman) to its root rather than becoming dependent upon its lower patterns. Instead of treating hours and days as independent fates that rule over us, we sanctify time itself as a vessel for Hashem's presence (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5651).

• The Sfas Emes here supplies a concise map of occult practices. He explains the difference with a striking observation about "And I have placed My words in your mouth" (va-asim devarai be-ficha). The Hebrew verb va-asim ("I constantly place") indicates a continuous, ongoing placement far beyond a one-time event at Sinai. The letters of Torah were placed within the hearts of Israel, and yet they can unfold through changing explanations and combinations at every moment. Across these composite discourses (5647–5649), the Sfas Emes contrasts the fatalistic bondage of onenus—subjugating oneself to auspicious and inauspicious hours—with the liberating power of Torah speech, which sanctifies and elevates time itself (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5647).

G. NOT TO PERFORM KOSEM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 167

As the Torah says, There shall not be found among you… one who practices divination (Devarim 18:10, Parshas Shoftim)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to perform occult rituals to try to divine the future?
- Is consulting with a diviner included in this prohibition?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

A diviner (kosem) is one who repeatedly strikes the ground with his staff, chants strange incantations, empties his mind, and gazes intently at the earth until he enters a convulsive, trance-like state, whereupon he foretells future events.

Other diviners cast patterns in sand or throw stones; others cast a leather strap to the ground, or lean upon a staff and ask whether they should proceed or refrain, as Scripture states: "My people consult their piece of wood, and their staff declares to them" (Hoshea 4:12).

All of these occult practices are categorized under the biblical prohibition of divination (kesem).

Whoever performs any of these acts of divination violates this biblical negative commandment;

However, consulting a diviner to receive his prognostications is forbidden by rabbinic law.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In Shoftim (5640), the Sfas Emes sets two tens opposite each other: the Aseres HaMaamaros through which Hashem created the natural world and the Aseres HaDibros spoken to Israel at Sinai. His precise claim is that the first ten establish the order within which natural forces operate. Those forces may be capable of producing remarkable knowledge or effects, but remaining within them does not amount to direct communion with their Creator. Israel was selected for "a manner exalted above nature"—a way of life higher than this fixed natural order. The people attained it through the response we will do (na'aseh): they subordinated their action to Hashem's command and thus became able to hear the inner voice (kol) of His word. The Sfas Emes also applies the principle individually: according to a person's self-nullification before Hashem, he can merit an understanding of Divine instruction. This gives the negative prohibition a remarkable positive aim—protecting access to Torah rather than allowing spiritual curiosity to terminate in nature alone (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5640).

• The Sfas Emes gives a remarkably concentrated spiritual classification when explaining "You shall be wholehearted" (tamim tihyeh). There is wisdom in the world's ordinary order, a wisdom which he relates to the Aseres HaMaamaros. He then distinguishes occult specialties: those who practice astrological hour-calculating (onenos) read time, diviners (kosemim) operate in the sphere of physical deed (ma'aseh), and practitioners of necromancy (ov) and spirit-divination (yidoni) look for knowledge in souls (nefashos). By assigning divinations (kesamim) to physical deed (ma'aseh), he makes its proper conceptual opposite easier to understand. Created actions are real, but they are not to become an autonomous source of spiritual instruction. Instead of seeking guidance through divination in external deeds, a Jew cleaves wholeheartedly to the living word of Hashem (dvar Hashem) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5647).

• The Sfas Emes opens by reading "You shall be wholehearted" (tamim tihyeh) together with the promise "a prophet from your midst" (navi mi-kirbecha). This juxtaposition raises an apparent puzzle. If Israel is told not to consult diviners, how is it meant to receive knowledge of matters that ordinary human observation cannot disclose? The Sfas Emes does not say that such knowledge is inherently undesirable. Instead, the problem is the person's desire to obtain it through a shortcut that bypasses his own spiritual development. He invokes the

principle that "according to a person's deeds, the spirit of holiness rests upon him." The contrast between refining one's own deeds (ma'asecha) and seeking shortcuts through divination supplies the spiritual mechanism. A person ought to cultivate wholeheartedness (temimus) through his own avodah, joining the body with the root of his soul (shoresh nishmaso). The passage does not describe the halachic acts of a kosem, but explicitly names diviners (kosemim) as the wrong source of hidden knowledge and offers the alternative route through wholeheartedness (temimus) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5638).

H. NOT TO PERFORM CHOVER

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 169

As the Torah says, There shall not be found among you… or a charmer (Devarim 18:10-11, Parshas Shoftim)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it permitted to cast charm on snakes or scorpions so that they don't do any harm?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The practice of the charmer (chover chaver) consists of whispering esoteric incantations in an unintelligible tongue to cast a spell over a serpent or scorpion so that it will not inflict harm.

Some charmers hold an object such as a key or stone in hand while whispering their incantations; all such practices are forbidden. If the charmer held any object in hand or performed a physical act while uttering his incantations,

Even if he merely pointed with his finger or moved a physical object during the incantation, he violates this biblical negative commandment.

If he performed no physical action whatsoever, and likewise if someone solicits a charmer to cast such a spell, the act is forbidden by rabbinic law.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

1. NOT TO INQUIRE FROM OV

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 170

As the Torah says, Do not turn to the ovoth (mediums); (Vayikra 19:31, Parshas Kedoshim)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Is it permitted to attempt to contact the spirits of the dead to find out information?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

A necromancer who evokes an ov performs ritual incantations until the inquirer hears a voice speaking to him as if from deep underground;

Similarly, a practitioner may take the skull of a deceased person and burn incense to it until a voice emerges from beneath his armpit, answering the inquirer's queries.

Both the practitioner who performs this necromancy and the client who inquires of him violate this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The hardest case is Shaul's. The Urim did not answer him, the prophets were silent, and it was a time of darkness and night. If ever asking below could be excused, it was then: what else was a king to do when heaven refused to speak? The Midrash on “And you shall be only above” (ve-hayisa rak lema'alah) closes the door even there: even in a dark era when one does not merit to inquire Above, one must never turn to inquire of the impure forces below. And the Midrash ties it to “She bestows good upon him and never evil” (gemalashu tov ve-lo ra):

Israel have no cleaving to evil, "all the days of his life"—including the dark nights of exile. The ov promises an answer; the Torah promises only Him, and the one who would ask must learn to ask no one else (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5651).

• Yeshayahu's rebuke—"Should a people not seek their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" (Yeshayahu 8:19)—states the asker's folly in one image: one who wants living guidance asks the dead. The Sfas Emes, commenting on the Midrash that it would have been far better for Shaul to inquire of the Urim VeTumim Above, makes this image into the taam of the inquire-lav itself. Why should asking the ov be worse than asking any other false channel? Because of the direction it reverses. Looking, he teaches from our Sages of blessed memory (Chazal), is from above to below: if a man's eyes are opened in Torah, he sees from within the Torah even the wonders that occur in nature. This is why even a true scrap of knowledge, when fetched from below, becomes "inquiring of the dead on behalf of the living" (doreish be-ad ha-chayim el ha-meisim): it arrives detached from the life that would make it wisdom, and the asker, having sought the living among the dead, is left with a dead answer to a living question (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5657).

• The Sfas Emes records a penetrating teaching from his grandfather concerning the placing side by side of "You shall be wholehearted" (tamim tihyeh) with the promise of a prophet. The Torah appears to say: do not consult the occult specialists of the other nations because Hashem will provide Israel with a true prophet. But what happens when prophecy disappears? A further point deepens the answer. The existence of many natural techniques is itself an opportunity to display the quality of Israel (Yisrael): they knowingly refrain from trying those channels and surrender themselves to Hashem. The absence of visible prophetic certainty is therefore not evidence that their fidelity has no content. It makes the fidelity meaningful. Expanding upon a parable from his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, the Sfas Emes explains why turning to occult mediums remains strictly forbidden even in the darkness of exile when open prophecy is concealed: loyal faith during concealment is the very bond that keeps Klal Yisrael attached to the King (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5647).

J. NOT TO PERFORM OV

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 172

As the Torah says, There shall not be found among you… or one that consults an ov (medium) or a yid'oni (wizard); (Devarim 18:10, Parshas Shoftim)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If someone transgressed and consulted an ov or a yid'oni, he is subject to rabbinic lashes for disobedience (makas mardus). He does not receive biblical lashes (malkos) because consulting involves no physical deed (lav she'ein bo ma'aseh); however, if he performed a physical action directed by the necromancer's oracle, he incurs biblical lashes.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

K. NOT TO INQUIRE FROM YEDONI

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 171

As the Torah says, Do not turn... and to the yid'onim (wizards); (Vayikra 19:31, Parshas Kedoshim)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

A practitioner of yid'oni places the bone of a creature known as yiddo'a into his mouth, burns incense to it, and performs occult rituals until the bone mysteriously speaks, foretelling future events. Both the practitioner who conjures it and the inquirer who seeks its counsel violate this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In the Sfas Emes's explanation of "You shall be wholehearted" (tamim tihyeh), he divides the created order into world (olam), time and the yearly cycle (shanah), soul (nefesh) and names the corresponding lower forms of knowledge. Soothsayers (me'onenim) concern time, diviners (kosemim) concern action, and necromancers (ov ve-yidoni) attempt to draw knowledge from the spirits of the dead. The significance of this last category is subtle. The soul or person is not rejected as a source of spiritual meaning. Rather, the way knowledge is sought among the souls (nefashos) matters. A lower technique centered on created souls is not the same thing as the living prophetic voice that emerges from Klal Yisrael. While onenus and kesem attempt to manipulate times and actions, ov and yidoni corrupt the very soul (nefesh) by binding human consciousness to the realm of death instead of the living word of Hashem's prophets (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5647).

L. NOT TO PERFORM YEDONI

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 173

As the Torah says, "There shall not be found among you… or one that consults an ov (medium) or a yid'oni (wizard)" (Devarim 18:10–11, Parshas Shoftim).

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If someone transgressed and consulted an ov or a yid'oni, he is subject to rabbinic lashes for disobedience (makas mardus). He does not receive biblical lashes because mere verbal consultation involves no physical deed (lav she'ein bo ma'aseh); however, if he performed a physical action based on the advice of these inquiries, he incurs biblical lashes.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

M. NOT TO INQUIRE FROM THE DEAD

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 174

As the Torah says, There shall not be found among you… or a necromancer (Devarim 18:10, Parshas Shoftim)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition refers to necromancy (doresh el hameisim), such as one who afflicts himself with fasting and spends the night sleeping in a cemetery so that an unclean spirit or deceased soul will visit him in a dream and reveal

The answers to what he inquired; or one who performs any other occult act so that the spirit of a deceased person will appear and inform him. Anyone who engages in these practices violates this negative commandment.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult sign shows that one does not trust that Hashem loves them and is taking care of them.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ "When they say to you: Inquire of the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter — should not a people inquire of its God? Should one inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?!" (Yeshayahu 8:19). Rabbi Levi said: To what may this be compared? To a father who lost track of his son and went wandering through the cemetery searching for him among the graves. A wise man who was standing near the cemetery saw him and asked: "Your son whom you lost — was he alive or dead when you lost him?" The father answered him: "Alive!" The wise man said to him: "Utter fool! Why are you looking for a living child among graves?! Everywhere in the world, it is the living who provide for the needs of the dead (making their shrouds and tending to their burial) — do the dead ever provide for the needs of the living?!" So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, lives and endures forever and ever, as it is written: "But Hashem is the true God; He is the living God and everlasting King" (Yirmiyahu 10:10), whereas the idols and necromancers of the nations are dead, as it is written: "They have a mouth, but cannot speak; they have eyes, but cannot see" (Tehillim 115:5) — and yet foolish people forsake the Living God Who sustains all worlds and go inquiring of the dead!

Yalkut Shimoni on Isaiah 413:2 & Parallel Vayikra Rabbah 6:6

N. NOT TO PERFORM SORCERY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 168

As the Torah says, There shall not be found among you… or a sorcerer (Devarim 18:10, Parshas Shoftim)

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The practice of sorcery (kishuf) involves manipulating occult combinations of specific roots, herbs, and stones, or joining various physical implements to disrupt the natural order. Anyone who performs a physical act of sorcery (oseh ma'aseh) incurs the capital death penalty administered by the court (beis din). Soliciting a sorcerer to perform witchcraft on one's behalf is strictly forbidden by rabbinic law.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. Putting credibility in these occult practices can obscure the belief that Hashem runs the world and is taking care of us.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

ALSHICH

There are two kinds of people who turn to sorcery, one who does not believe that G-d runs the world and another who faces great challenges.

To the first person, the Torah would like him to learn that Hashem indeed does run the world. To the second person, the Torah would like him to introspect and see if perhaps there is a reason for his challenges and see if he can change him behavior.

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:37)

Sorcery and witchcraft was often associated with a worship of a pagan god in order to access additional powers.

ABARBANEL

Sorcery and witchcraft was often associated with sexually immoral practices.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 62)

Sorcery has the power to cause great harm to people.

Also, Hashem does not want us to attempt to attempt to manipulate the rules of nature which sustain the world.

RAMBAN

The forces involved in sorcery can bring great spiritual impurity to a person.

RABBEINU BACHYA

People who are insecure or mentally unstable turn to sorcerers. Sorcerers may take advantage of their blind belief and induce them to commit crimes or other immoral things for their own evil purposes.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (3:2)

Because Hashem made a counterpart to all good in the universes, then just as we have said that you can get a hashpah of good, and with that hashpah you can cause a supernatural occurrence, the same can be done with the forces of tumah, although they separate you from Hashem. When you say the name of the coach of evil you can draw forth a supernatural hashpah of knowledge, or you can perform a supernatural action. You can also access shedim and they will perform tasks for you. But just like we said for the cochos of good, that you are limited by their specific powers, the same is for the chochos of evil. When a person access the cochos of tumah, the chochos can push away the natural hashpah that Hashem normally sends. This is the meaning of Chazal that kishuf weakens Hashem's power it pushes away the natural hashpah. Again the chochos of ra can only affect the natural order to a specific degree. Additionally, if Hashem wants to save someone from the effect of kishuf, Hashem can stop it from working.

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the fundamental disagreement between the Rambam and Ramban whether sorcery is real, or just an illusion
- Discuss how many of the reason to avoid sorcery is really to avoid certain evil people. Discuss the broader implications of not associating with negative peers.

16. To Realize All Adversity Is from Hashem for Good

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-31

As it states "you shall know in your heart that just as a man disciplines his son so does Hashem discipline you" (Devarim 8:5, Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred mitzvah to accept Hashem's righteous judgment (tzidduk hadin) in all that befalls a person, whether it affects his physical health, his children, or his financial livelihood, as Scripture states: "You shall know in your heart that just as a father disciplines his son, so does Hashem your God discipline you" (Devarim 8:5). A

person should engrave this truth upon his heart, bow his head in humility, and maintain quiet composure, emulating Aharon HaKohen of whom Scripture testifies: "And Aharon was silent" (Vayikra 10:3). One must never claim to be more righteous than the Creator, nor dismiss tribulations as mere random coincidence (keri), for the Torah warns that if one views Divine chastisement as happenstance, Hashem will treat him with the fury of happenstance (Vayikra 26:28); rather, one should engage in honest introspection and return to Hashem in complete repentance (teshuvah). This attitude forms the core foundation of loving Hashem "with all your might" (Devarim 6:5), which Chazal interpreted to mean: with every single measure that Hashem metes out to you, whether of blessing or of suffering, accept it with gratitude and inner joy, as King David proclaimed: "Of lovingkindness and justice will I sing" (Tehillim 101:1) — if it is lovingkindness I will sing, and if it is strict justice I will sing. Chazal praised this exalted level, declaring: "Those who are insulted yet do not insult in return, who hear their disgrace and do not reply, who act out of love and rejoice amid suffering — concerning them Scripture states: 'And those who love Him are like the sun rising in its full might'" (Shoftim 5:31). All Divine discipline stems from Hashem's profound love for Klal Yisroel, as Scripture assures: "I have loved you, says Hashem" (Malachi 1:2). Such tribulations are cherished because everything ordained by the Creator is designed for our ultimate good, as Scripture affirms: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Mishlei 27:6), and: "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Tehillim 23:4).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Bitachon means to realize that Hashem loves us unconditionally, knows better than us what is truly good for us, he isn't limited by any obstacle and he can reverse any challenge, and that no one else can harm or even benefit us, unless it accords with Hashem's will. The more we put our trust in Hashem, the more blessings Hashem sends to us. This mitzvah teaches us to realize that everything comes from Hashem, and ultimately all that Hashem does is because he loves us and must be for our best.

When we put our trust in Hashem that helps us develop a love for Hashem, and that love motivates us to perform mitzvos. In addition, it reminds us that all that we have comes from Hashem, and we therefore should be grateful to Hashem, and manifest that gratitude by yearning to fulfill His will. Also, we realize that because Hashem runs the world, we cannot in the long run be successful by being dishonest or violating Hashem's will. Finally, because we realize that all that we have comes from Hashem in order to be a blessing for others, we are inspired to use our resources to help others as much as possible.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 1)

Every phase and circumstance of mortal life is a test (nisayon). Passing a test elevates the soul, making a person more whole and connected to Hashem. This physical world was designed as a preparatory training ground — a spiritual gymnasium — whose primary purpose is to fulfill mitzvos while overcoming adversity (ikar hamitzius lekayem mitzvos vela'amod b'nisayon).

SFAS EMES

• The sale of Yosef was sealed by a cherem — a solemn ban against revealing it — yet the question burns: why did Hashem Himself not tell Yaakov about the sale of Yosef? How can silence in the face of such suffering be reconciled with a good Hashem? The Sfas Emes answers with the principle of this mitzvah: it is possible that it was for his good: Yaakov would have had greater pain had he known that Yosef was sold to Egypt, a place of immorality and impurity. It appears that Hashem did everything for the good, for it was not possible for Israel to be redeemed without Yosef's descent to Egypt first — and even Yosef's trial in Egypt could only happen this way: precisely because he was sold unjustly, this helped him not to be swallowed among them. The heart of the lesson is clear: what looks like the cruelest abandonment — a father not told, a son sold — is the precise engineering of the good, down to the injustice that protected the victim from assimilation (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeishev 5636).

• Moshe's first words to Hashem after being sent were a protest: why have You done evil to this people? The midrash reads the sneh as the answer to the cry: the fire above burns but does not consume — Hashem hinted to him: just as the bush is not consumed, so Israel will not be consumed in Egypt. But a hint is not an explanation; the question remains why the fire must burn at all. He showed him that the bondage and the afflictions in Egypt are under supernal providence, and the afflictions that come from Above are only for the good. The heart of the lesson is clear: affliction from Above is the white fire — it burns but does not consume, and those who cleave to Hashem pass through it alive. The difficulty is the fire; the good is that it cannot consume (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Shemos 5649).

• The Torah records the desert generation's accusation, that Hashem had brought them out because He hated them. The Sfas Emes treats this as much more than a mistaken assessment of circumstances. Hashem's original intention had been good, yet the people's interpretation of His conduct as hatred helped make the negative judgment a reality. Conversely, the positive measure is greater: when Israel receives rebuke as a sign of Divine love, its very quality can be transformed toward love. When we receive life's difficulties with faith that our Father in Heaven acts out of love, we transform strict judgment itself into blessing and closeness (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5642).

• "My son, do not despise the discipline of Hashem" — and the verse before it: "as a man disciplines his son, so Hashem your God disciplines you." The difficulty is sharp: the Torah calls the curses of Ki Savo discipline, instruction — and the halachah is that “we do not interrupt the reading of the admonitions” (ein mafsikin ba-kelalos). Why dignify the curses with continuity? If they are the record of wrath, why not break them up, interrupt them, show that they are not of the essence? The midrash answers that there is a way whose beginning is thorns and whose end is a plain — and the Sfas Emes unfolds what that means for the mitzvah of seeing the good in difficulty. The heart of the lesson is clear: the curses are not the opposite of the blessing; they are the thorn-road to the same plain, and we read them without pause because we do not cut them off from the One (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5657).

• The verse says the stone was great upon the mouth of the well — with the definite article, as though this were the stone, the archetypal obstacle. Why does the Torah linger on a stone? The Sfas Emes finds in it the portrait of the yetzer hara: the stumbling-stone that is the evil inclination is found everywhere — but upon the mouth of the well it is greatest of all. The well is tefillah—the service of the heart, the oral Torah that is prayer — and all the inclination's striving is to block prayer, as every servant of Hashem knows. The obstacle forces the integration; it

> demands that the life match the lips. “And Yaakov approached” hints at the three daily prayers, in appeasement and in battle, by which the stone is rolled away. The heart of the lesson is clear: the thing that blocks you is protecting you, and when you are ready, you will roll it yourself (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeitzei 5644).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When Rabbi Eliezer was arrested by the Roman authorities on false suspicion of sectarianism, they brought him up to the tribunal platform (gradom) to be judged. The governor said to him: 'Should an elder of your stature occupy himself with such idle matters?' Rabbi Eliezer replied: 'I trust the Judge!' (Ne'eman alai ha-Dayan). The governor assumed Rabbi Eliezer was flattering him, whereas Rabbi Eliezer was speaking of his Father in Heaven—explaining why Heaven had allowed him to experience the humiliation of arrest. Impressed, the governor declared: 'Since you have trusted me, dimus—you are acquitted and free!' Yet when Rabbi Eliezer returned home, he remained deeply distressed at having even been arrested until Rabbi Akiva asked: 'My Master, perhaps a sectarian once spoke a word to you in the marketplace and it pleased you slightly?' Rabbi Eliezer exclaimed: 'Akiva, you have reminded me!'—recalling that once in the upper marketplace of Sepphoris he had heard a clever legal teaching cited in the name of a sectarian and had momentarily enjoyed the sharpness of the question.

Avodah Zarah 16b

❖ A person should always accustom himself to say: 'Everything that the Merciful One does, He does for the good!' (Kol de-avid Rachmana le-tav avid). Such was the incident with Rabbi Akiva, who was traveling on the road and arrived at a certain town, where he asked for lodging and was refused everywhere. He said: 'Everything that the Merciful One does, He does for the good!' He went out and camped in the open field. With him he had a rooster to wake him for study, a donkey to ride, and a lamp to study Torah by night. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp; a wild cat came and ate the rooster; a lion came and devoured the donkey. Yet Rabbi Akiva said: 'Everything that the Merciful One does, He does for the good!' That very night, an enemy army marched into the town and took its inhabitants captive. Rabbi Akiva said to his disciples: 'Did I not tell you that everything the Holy One, blessed be He, does is all for the good? Had the lamp been burning, the troop would have seen me; had the donkey brayed or the rooster crowed, the troop would have heard me and captured me!'

Berachos 60b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ "May I please have five minutes of your worthy guest': time to ask him an important question?" "Sit over here near his table and I'll present you to him as soon as he finishes saying the Birchas Hamazon after his meal." This was no ordinary guest for whom the gentleman impatiently waited. This was the Chofetz Chaim who had come to Vienna to participate in the world conference of Agudas Israel. As the meal drew towards a conclusion the Chofetz Chaim began reciting the twenty-third psalm as was his custom at every meal. Upon reaching the climactic words, "May goodness and kindness pursue me all the days as my Life," he turned to the visitor seated at the next table and said to him. "How does King David refer to goodness and kindness as 'pursuers' when such a term is generally used to describe troubles that run after a person? The answer must be that sometimes a person's activities on behalf of goodness and kindness truly become troublesome pursuers. He loses time and money because of charitable undertakings. Then his evil inclination urges him to think more of himself and his family and to limit his preoccupation with goodness and kindness. "It is for just such a conflict which King David has directed his advice. 'Listen, my son', he says, 'even if you think that goodness and kindness are troublesome pursuers, don't forsake them but rather pray that more goodness and kindness be your pursuers throughout your life. For no harm will come to the righteous man who is preoccupied with them and he will enjoy the fulfillment at the succeeding words — 'I will sit in the House of the L-rd for the length of my days.' This is the Psalmist's counsel for the man pursued by

his good deeds." Every man must have difficulties in his life. It is best that his difficulties come from opportunities to do chesed. When the Chofetz Chaim finished his explanation the visitor rose to say goodbye to the host. "But why are you rushing away before speaking to the Chofetz Chaim about your problem?" "Let me explain everything," answered the visitor. "For years I have been very busy with a Talmud Torah and Free Loan Fund which I established in my town. I spend most of my day attending to these two causes and my wife has lately begun to scold me for neglecting my personal business which has suffered as a result of my charitable activities. I refused to give up this sacred work so we decided to ask the Chofetz Chaim his opinion and to abide by his decision." "But when I heard the Chofetz Chaim just explain, as if he had anticipated my problem, that a man must cling to his charitable activities even if goodness and kindness become pursuers, my question was already answered. Now I am going to tell my wife what the Chofetz Chaim has ruled."

Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

❖ Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch was receiving his chassidim, when he abruptly told his gabbai' (assistant) to close the door and not allow anyone entry. Some of the chassidim, eager to understand the Rabbi's sudden desire for solitude, put their ears to the door and heard the Rabbi reciting Tehillim (Psalms) with heartrending tones. The Rabbi later explained that whenever a chassid asks him for guidance to do teshuvah for a transgression, he immediately searches for that transgression within himself, according to the Baal Shem Tov's teaching that the world is a mirror, and had he not been guilty of the same thing, even in a much more diluted form, it would never have come to his attention. The discovery of an analogous defect within himself then allows him to make the necessary amends. " "When one chassid told me about something he had done wrong,' I promptly began searching for a similar shortcoming in myself. However, I was unable to find it. This meant that I was deceiving myself, and that somewhere there was a dereliction of which I was unaware. Being oblivious of this would preclude my taking any corrective action, and I therefore had to pray intensely for Divine guidance to help me discover this defect in myself "

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ When Rav Yaakov Meir Schechter was 87 he would climb up two floors to his apartment. His Talmidim asked him why he does not move to an apartment on the ground floor so that he doesn't have the bother of the steps. He answered I don't look at steps as impediments to prevent me from getting home, I look at them as the means of getting to my destination. Obstacles in general can be looked at as impediments, or a means to elevating us to bring us to our destination. Similarly Rebbetzin Ausband said, Before the Nazi's came to Lithuania, I would have given any amount of money to not go through the gehinom I endured. But after I have been through it, there is no amount of money that you can give me that can replace the closeness to Hashem I have achieved because of it.

Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology

❖ In a certain city resided a famous doctor who was known far and wide as an expert physician and healer of the sick. His uniqueness lay in the fact that he did not cure his patients through medicines and bitter potions; rather, he knew how to determine with utmost exactitude which foods were making the patient ill. He would advise him to refrain from eating those foods, and the patient would recuperate. On one occasion, a father and son visited the doctor because of the son's illness. The son was spoiled to the extreme, and when he heard the list of foods that he would no longer be able to eat, he grimaced and asked to leave at once. "Listen to my advice," whispered the doctor to the father. "Take your son to a different doctor; he will prescribe for your son medicines which are as bitter as wormwood. When he tastes them, he will prefer to return to me..." And so it was. The Dubno Maggid explained that Hashem bestowed a great kindness upon us by showing us a path to repentance. But when a man chooses not to take this road, and instead hardens his heart and abstains from repenting, Hashem sends him various forms of suffering. When man tastes their bitter taste, he immediately repents wholeheartedly.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In his final year, Rabbi Hirsch Diskind, the dean of Bais Yaakov for 35 years, suffered severe pain on a constant basis. He once told me that he never realized that pain can reach such heights for extended periods of time. The source of the pain was from his back which suffered from a deterioration of the bone structure. During this year all the people who came in contact with him were fortunate to learn a powerful lesson. It is a lesson which if successfully absorbed can carry a person through many challenging circumstances. When asked how he was feeling his response was always the same. The phrase he used changed from time to time but the message was always the same. "Oh! How Hashem loves me! He who Hashem loves does He punish!" This comes from a verse in Mishle (3:12). See Shaarei Teshuvah 2:4. Alternatively, he would say "Oh, how lucky I am, paying only pennies on the dollar!" Referring to the notion our Sages teach us that receiving punishment in this world for our misdeeds is much more cleansing than receiving it in the next world thereby mitigating or totally removing the pain one will receive there. After hearing his response, one of his grandchildren exclaimed "Zaide, you are such a tzaddik!" He responded "A tzaddik?! One must be foolish to have any other attitude. I have already paid the price. Why should I not appreciate it? After having paid tuition for school and having gone to school, not to use your education would be foolish!" He always said that one should never pray for yisurim (any form of pain; physical and emotional) but if you are given them - cherish them!

As told by Paysach Diskind

❖ A story is told about a terminally ill fifteen year old who had been treated by the Rambam. Knowing the end was near, the Rambam asked him to come to him in a dream and answer three questions that had been troubling him for some time. The first two were halachic. The third one was why young people have to die. The boy was niftar shortly after and three days later he appeared to the Rambam in a dream. He gave answers to the first two questions and then addressed the third one. "I fully intended to ask the question," he began, "but the closer I got to the kisei hakavod. The clearer everything became. Eventually I got so close that things became so clear and obvious and the question simply disappeared."

Impact, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The Baron was about to leave on a long journey and he was giving instructions to his manager. "Near the windmill there is a house in which the Jew, Yaakov, lives. You are to collect a yearly rent of 200 rubles from him, but you won't have any trouble with him for he is an honest fellow who pays on time." Once the baron was gone the manager, a greedy and corrupt anti-semite, started to make trouble for Yaakov and the rest of the Baron's tenants. He raised Yaakov's rent to 400 rubles and insisted that he pay all of it at once. This caught Yaakov by surprise and he was forced to run around borrowing money for the rent. Despite all of his efforts he succeeded in only raising 380 rubles which he brought to pay his rent. "Where are the other twenty rubles?" shouted the manager. "But I can't afford to pay such a high rent," cried Yaakov, "and I borrowed every groschen I could to put together this sum." "Jewish dog," bellowed the manager, "you are trying to cheat me out of twenty rubles. You will therefore receive a proper punishment — one lash of the whip for each ruble." The poor Jew's protests were of no avail and he was seized by the baron's guards and given twenty lashes. A few months later the baron returned and Yaakov decided to tell him how cruelly the manager had treated him and his neighbors. When the baron heard about the rents that were raised without his approval and the lashes he became furious. "What a wicked fellow this is to mistreat such a good and faithful tenant as you have always been. But I shall make it up to you and punish him accordingly. For each lash he gave you he shall pay you 100 rubles. I know that he has no cash for he took all the money he stole from you and from me and bought himself a big mansion for 4,000 rubles. Since you have 2,000 rubles coming to you for the twenty lashes, I am taking away half of his mansion and giving it to you." His wife had waited outside the baron's castle and now she rushed over to Yaakov to ask him what had happened. With a sad look on his face Yaakov showed her the deed which the baron had given to him for half of the manager's mansion. "But why do you look so sad, my dear husband. You should rejoice at receiving a 2,000 ruble gift from the baron!" "What bothers me, my dear wife, is why the manager didn't give me 40 lashes so that I would now have been given his entire mansion." "When a man suffers in this world he cries and complains. He tries his best to avoid 'twenty lashes' and does not welcome any discomfort or pain. But

when the time will come when he sees how much of a reward is in store for the man who suffered, he will feel sorry that he didn't have more troubles. A man must learn to accept suffering with love, for his present pains are a guarantee of a pleasant future."

Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

❖ Regarding the question as to why the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper, R' Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein of Kaminetz related an astounding parable: A king was accustomed to staging an annual gala celebration on the anniversary of his ascension to the throne. On the tenth anniversary of his reign, the king planned a celebration that promised to be truly incredible. In honor of the occasion, he had a brand new silk cloak — the likes of which had never been seen — sewn for himself. In addition, he desired that new uniforms be sewn for each and every one of the servants in the palace. The king hired a world-renowned tailor, who was famous for the magnificent garments he routinely produced. He went about his task with alacrity, as the king had issued him but one warning: "Work quickly," said the king. "For there is much work to do and time is short..." The tailor first approached a fabric merchant and purchased a large quantity of ordinary wool with which to weave the servants' uniforms. He then bought silk of extraordinary quality that had been imported from China, as well as linen and purple fabrics whose splendid colors were absolutely breathtaking. Without giving it much thought or planning, the tailor quickly sewed the servants' uniforms, as his main objective was to finish them in as little time as possible. He then shifted his attention to sewing the king's cloak—an altogether different task, one which he approached and trembling. He took measurements once and then took them again, marked the area that he intended to cut, and proceeded to do so ever so cautiously. Next it was time to stitch the garment, which he did with expert craftsmanship, concealing the stitches so as not to mar its beauty. He hemmed the cloak, and concluded by ironing it; it was now ready to be presented to the king. The cloak began to boast before the woolen uniforms, "Look at how exquisite I am! You, on the other hand, are ordinary and coarse." The woolen uniforms did not take the insults lying down; rather, they offered a reply. "Why are you acting so arrogantly?" they asked. "just look at how many times the tailor punctured you with his needle; why, he did so time and time again! Not only that, but upon completing each stage of your sewing, the tailor pressed you with a steaming hot iron." While their claims were indeed correct, the cloak did not bother to retort to such fools. Rather, he chose to bear their words in silence. When the anticipated day of the anniversary arrived, the king stood exalted and glorified as he wore his stunning silk cloak, while the palace staff wore their run — of-the-mill woolen uniforms... Only then did the uniforms realize that they had been mistaken. All of the suffering which the king's cloak had endured was simply in order to transform it into a magnificent cloak! So it is in this world, said R' Eichenstein. All of the suffering which the righteous endure is only for the sake of purifying them so that they will be able to be magnificently radiant in the World to Come.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO ALWAYS SAY GAM ZU LETOVA

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-25

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Chazal commanded that a person should cultivate the steadfast inner conviction in response to every occurrence: "This too is for the best" (gam zu l'tovah), accepting all Divine decrees with genuine serenity and joy.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When the disciples of Nachum Ish Gamzu moved his bed from a dilapidated house before carrying out the furniture and the roof immediately collapsed, he explained that his afflictions came because once, while traveling with three donkeys laden with food and drink, a starving poor man begged him: 'My Master, sustain me!' Before Nachum finished unloading his donkeys, the poor man collapsed and died, and Nachum wept over him and accepted suffering in atonement. And why was he called Nachum Ish Gamzu? Because whatever befell him, he declared: 'This too is for the good!' (Gam zu letovah). Once Israel needed to send a gift to Caesar and chose Nachum Ish Gamzu because he was accustomed to miracles. He carried a chest filled with precious jewels and pearls; while he slept at an inn overnight, the innkeepers emptied the chest and filled it with ordinary earth. When he arrived and Caesar opened the chest and saw earth, Caesar raged: 'The Jews are mocking me!' As Nachum was led out to execution, he declared: 'This too is for the good!' Eliyahu HaNavi appeared disguised as one of the royal ministers and said to Caesar: 'Perhaps this earth is from the miraculous dust of their father Abraham, who threw earth that turned into swords and stubble that turned into arrows!' There was one province that Caesar had never been able to conquer; they tested the earth against it and conquered it! They led Nachum into the royal treasury, filled his chest with jewels and pearls, and executed the innkeepers who had stolen the gems.

Taanis 21a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In 5754 (1994), Rabbi Dovid Silber visited the ninety-year-old Torah sage HaRav Boruch HaLevi Leizerovski, a disciple of the Chofetz Chaim and former Rav of a Lithuanian shul in Lodz. After sharing memories of his great rebbe, Rav Leizerovski recounted a personal miracle from Auschwitz that illustrates how Hashem's hashgachah pratis guides a person's steps even in the darkest valley: "After surviving nearly three years of indescribable torment in Auschwitz, as the war neared its end, our barracks was ordered to undergo another selektzia before the infamous Dr. Mengele. Every inmate knew what selektzia meant: the weak were sent to the left to perish, while the able-bodied were sent to the right for labor. At that time, I was suffering from a severely abscessed wound on my heel that caused excruciating agony with every step. Summoning an iron will as I approached Mengele, I forced myself to walk with a brisk, normal stride, masking every sign of pain. Mengele motioned me to the right. "Yet the moment I passed him, I was seized by deep remorse. Since the day the Nazis entered Lodz, I had vowed never to rely on my own clever schemes to manipulate my fate, placing my life entirely in Hashem's hands. 'Have I suddenly become clever, trying to outsmart Heaven's decree?' I asked myself. Slipping past the guards, I sneaked back into the line approaching Mengele. This time I did not conceal my limp or the pain on my face. Immediately, Mengele flicked his finger to the left, placing me with the sick and infirm inmates. "We all assumed we were being led to the gas chambers and began reciting Vidui to prepare our souls for eternity. Instead, to our utter astonishment, we were loaded onto trucks and driven to a modern hospital compound inside Auschwitz that the Nazis had staged solely to deceive an upcoming International Red Cross inspection! There, world-class Jewish inmate physicians treated my infected foot and cared for us for two weeks until liberation. "Only afterward did I learn what befell the 'healthy' group sent to the right: that very day, they were forced out on the infamous freezing Death Marches, where nearly all of them perished on the roads. With my abscessed foot, I would not have survived half a day on that march. Prompting my heart to return to the line and be classified among the infirm was Hashem's exact vehicle for saving my life—just as Tehillim (92:6) proclaims: 'How great are Your deeds, Hashem; exceedingly profound are Your thoughts!'"

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ It's not that he wasn't grateful. Shmuel Grandman and his wife, Chanah, had a beautiful family of eleven, five of whom had gotten married in the past three years. But no matter what he did, he could not keep up with the bills. His meager salary from his job as a rebbi was definitely not doing it, so he took on some extra tutoring jobs, but he still was mired in debt. Feeling overwhelmed by the incredible pressure, Shmuel decided to do what he always did when things seemed

impossible. He went to the kever of his zeidy to daven. It was located on Har HaZeisim, which was one of the more dangerous places in Yerushalayim. The trip was not easy; many of the taxi drivers did not want to drive in the vicinity of Har HaZeisim, knowing that Arab youths threw rocks at the cars there. He was able to find a driver willing to take him to the foot of the mountain but he had to hike the rest of the way. It was a scorching hot day and almost no one else was in the area. Shmuel reached his grandfather's kever and immediately burst out in heartfelt sobs. He removed a Tehillim from his pocket and the words simply flowed forth. He invoked the zechusim of his parents and grandparents; he asked that in their merit, his overwhelming burden of debt would somehow disappear. Ten minutes turned into 20 and then 30. The draining tefillos took their toll, and Shmuel, totally spent, rested his head against the kever. With the sun beating down on him, Shmuel sat down, exhausted, and fell into a deep sleep. Then he began to dream. The dream was so vivid. Standing before him was his grandfather, whom he had admired and loved for so very long. His grandfather wiped the tears from Shmuel's face, and then Shmuel started to plead. "Please, Zeidy, tell me that in your merit things will not be so hard. Please tell me that the worst of our struggles are over. It is so very difficult! Please!" His grandfather looked at him with great love and concern. "Tell me, my dear einekel, why are you struggling so much? What is it that causes you so much aggravation?" Shmuel proceeded to tell his grandfather that he had married off five of his children in the past three years and that had caused a terrible strain on his finances. His zeidy pulled out a family picture and began to look at it. As he did this, Shmuel noticed something terribly wrong with this picture. "Why does Yanky, my youngest son, look deformed? Something is awfully wrong! Why is it like that?" Shmuel's voice quivered with fright. His grandfather looked at him with compassion. "Let me explain: The picture that I am holding before me is the picture of what your family looks like up here in Shamayim. This is the way it was meant to be. Your youngest son was supposed to have had shocking deformities. But we, your bubbies and zeidies, all davened that the Almighty should remove this frightening edict. Instead we asked that you should have to endure some other type of difficult challenge, one that would not have to affect your children so directly. Why? Do you want it to be reversed?" Shmuel began to scream, "No! No! Noooooooooooo!" Suddenly he woke up. He looked around and quickly took his wallet from his pocket. He removed from it the most recent picture of his children that had been taken at his daughter's wedding. His eyes darted immediately to his youngest, Yanky. He looked at his beautiful, shining face with his mischievous, infectious smile. All of a sudden, Shmuel realized how ungrateful and shortsighted he had been. His zeidy had taught him in a very memorable way how we must each face the challenges in our life. Shmuel stood up, dusted off his pants, and began to head down the mountain. It was time to daven Minchah. He didn't want to be late. After all, he had so much to thank Hashem for.

A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ There was once a man who was sailing on a boat. He encountered stormy weather, which eventually became so severe that he could not handle the boat any longer. Finally, the craft capsized and he fell overboard; eventually, he was washed to shore. He did not know where he was and began to call out to see if anyone was nearby. No voice responded; he was greeted only by the echo of his own screams. As night fell, he started a small fire and lay down to try to get some sleep. The next morning, he began to look around for food. He caught some fish and sat down by the fire to eat. After he had gotten some food in his stomach, he set out to look for signs of life, but could find none. This became his daily routine. After a few days, he built a hut, a makeshift structure that he hoped would have to last only a few days. But with each passing day, he wondered whether he would ever be rescued. After a week, he returned from his daily sojourn across the island to find his hut completely engulfed in flames. He felt hopeless; after everything he had gone through, he had nowhere to sleep. For the first time, he was despondent over his situation. He fell to the ground on his knees and cried as he had never cried before, finally crying himself to sleep. He awoke from his deep sleep to find four men standing above him. He was completely startled and asked, "Who are you? Where did you come from?" They responded that they were part of a rescue team that

had been searching for him. They had spent days looking for him and were on the verge of giving up hope. "Finally, you got enough sense to realize that in order to find you, we would need to see the smoke from a fire. It was a smart move to make that huge fire. That is what saved your life!"

Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ When Rav Moshe Sherer was a young boy, a doctor diagnosed him with a severe fever that could prove fatal. He wrote out a prescription. Basya Sherer, his mother scraped together whatever money was available. The pharmacist assistant was attending the pharmacy. He told her the price. She didn't have enough but begged him to take what she had to save the boy. He accepted it. She ran home to give the medicine, but she fell and the glass bottle shattered. With no money she desperately went back to the pharmacy all he had was the wet bag and glass shards. She asked the head pharmacist to give her the medicine. She said she would do anything, and any work but she can't pay. The pharmacist took the wet bag and glass to the back, but returned back very white. "Angels are watching over you, Angels". This was the wrong medicine and it would have killed a young boy. Basya used that story that at time when we think we are facing our greatest crisis that is the moment when Hashem is preparing to bring out the greatest salvation. R' Moshe Sherer grew up with that credo. When he was in his seventies he was at an appointment when the doctor said he needed an emergency bypass surgery immediately. After the surgery he had a very strict regimen of exercise and diet to strengthen his heart. He was very careful and became very healthy. Shortly afterwards he was diagnosed with cancer. He would not have been able to survive the chemotherapy if his heart had not been strengthened. He had the chemo and lived much longer. He used that as a similar example of how great tragedy can really be the biggest salvation.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 286

❖ One further aspect of Rav Gifter's love of Torah can be called his "freshness" in learning. He never seemed to tire of the experience. Rabbi Yaakov Feitman, former' Rav of the Young Israel of Cleveland, shared: One of my last memories of being able to speak with the Rosh HaYeshiva was also the most poignant' The rosh hayeshivah's illness was beginning to take its horrible toll, he greatly struggled with his short term memory, but that great soul was not allowing it to triumph. He told me, "I am grateful to Hashem, because some get depressed by my disease. I am, however, fully b'simchah. I cannot learn as I once was able to, but now I can learn like a young bachur, as if everything is new." His love for Torah remained fresh, even in the most trying of circumstances'.

Rav Gifter, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The origins of what was to become the renowned "House of Brisk" can be traced to events that happened during the times of R. Chaim of Volozhin, zt"l, the father of the yeshivah system: In the district of Kovno, there lived a wealthy, God-fearing man, R. Moshe Soloveichik. He had inherited his wealth from his parents, themselves affluent people. Since he owned great hardwood forests, he went into the lumber business, cutting his trees and selling the wood for a good profit. His great wealth did not corrupt him nor distract him from the service of his Maker, and he was open to the pleas of the poor and downtrodden, giving willingly and thus earning a reputation for outstanding kindness and sanctifying Hashem's name. Yet, the day came when the wheel of fortune turned swiftly, leaving him penniless — virtually overnight. His friends and acquaintances were left wondering: how could such a fate have befallen this man, whose philanthropy had been so widely praised? They couldn't fathom the Divine justice in the matter; why was this man deserving of such misfortune? R. Chaim of Volozhin, leader of his generation, convened a beis din, comprised of well-versed talmidei chachamim, to delve into this very question. What was the cause of this sudden loss of R. Moshe's great wealth? The members of beis din examined his account books exhaustively, but found nothing amiss. Unable to point to any other cause for his economic collapse, they concluded that it must have been because he transgressed the rabbinic prohibition of giving tzedakah in excess of a fifth of one's fortune. This was the only reason they could find for R. Moshe's financial woes — that in giving away too much, he had gone against the teachings of Chazal limiting donations to charity to twenty percent of one's capital.

The beis din reported its conclusion to R. Chaim of Volozhin, but he rejected their findings. He could not accept that for such a transgression R. Moshe should be punished by losing his entire fortune; and thus the matter was left hanging. In the meantime, now that R. Moshe had no business to attend to, he turned to the beis hamidrash and embarked on a vigorous course of study. Little by little, hidden talents revealed themselves, until it became clear that he excelled in Torah study. He advanced steadily, gaining renown among the Torah scholars, until before long he was counted among the best of them, eventually achieving the position of av beis din of Kovna. As the years went by, he encouraged his sons to follow in his footsteps, and they, too, took up the challenge and became famous lamdanim in their own right "Now I have the explanation," said R. Chaim, "as to why R. Moshe lost his fortune so quickly. For his great acts of tzedakah deserved a tremendous reward: to sire a dynasty of talmidei chachamim. But since such a family cannot spring from a wealthy home, his wealth was taken away, in order to release him from the bonds of worldly involvement, thus enabling him to learn Torah in all circumstances, and clearing the way for him to raise generations of outstanding scholars."

The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 1

❖ Rav Moshe Feinstein used to get driven from the Lower East Side of Manhattan to Staten Island once a week. It was done so that he could give a shiur in his son's yeshivah. Once, while driving, his driver was stopped by a police officer and given a ticket for speeding. The driver asked, "How is it possible I received a ticket? I thought that while doing a mitzvah, one is protected from harm! Shouldn't driving the Rosh Yeshivah to give a shiur grant me special protection?" Rav Moshe answered, "Yes, you are correct. You were indeed granted protection. You were pulled over before someone got hurt."

From Experience Greatness, By Rabbi Moshe Hubner

❖ A man once cried to the Shpoler Zeide that he had been falsely accused of theft. The Zeide responded, "I too was once falsely accused of theft and was thrown into prison for two months. I did not bear any resentment against G-d, because I knew that He must have a purpose for my being there. "What happened was that I lodged at an inn, and another guest and I left together. I noticed that he frequently looked over his shoulder, but I did not ask him why. After we had walked some distance, we saw a wagon approaching, whereupon my companion asked me to watch his bags for him, saying that he would return momentarily. When the wagon approached, two men alighted, and one of them pointed at me and said, 'There is the thief!' They grabbed my companion's bag, and upon opening it found several silver items he had stolen from the inn. I protested that I had not taken anything and that there was another person to whom this bag belonged, but they did not believe me. They tied me up and brought me to town, and I was thrown into jail. "The other prisoners began tormenting me, pulling at my beard and payos (earlocks). They said that if I did not pay the initiation fee as a prisoner, they would beat me. When I told them that I had no money, they forced me to lie down and began beating me. When the first person hit me, he began to scream with pain, and his hand swelled to three times its size. The other prisoners were afraid to touch me, and I was left in peace. "One of the prisoners was called 'the gypsy,' but I learned that he was really of Jewish origin. He had been kidnapped as a young boy by a band of gypsies. He remembered, however, that his parents were Jews and that his name was Yaakov. He had been imprisoned for stealing horses. "I gradually impressed upon the man what it meant to be a Jew, and that he was obligated to observe the Torah and mitzvos. I taught him how to say the Shema and how to pray. Soon he began to avoid the treifah (non-kosher) food he was given and ate only fresh vegetables as I did. He accepted upon himself that if he would be freed he would become an honest person and return to Judaism. "One night I dreamt that the prophet Elijah told me to have no fear and to leave the prison. I took Yaakov by the hand, and when we came to the cell door we found it ajar. All the guards were in a deep sleep, and we left the prison unnoticed. I went to a nearby town and became the shamash (sexton) in a shul. Yaakov kept his promise and became an honest, sincere, and devout Jew. "It was then that I understood why the chain of events had led to my imprisonment. I had to bring the neshamah of Yaakov back to

Judaism. I consider it a privilege to have been given this mission, and I am glad of it, even though it necessitated my being in a jail for two months. Sometimes a person is sent to this earth for an entire lifetime, just to bring one neshamah back to its source."

Not Just Stories, by Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twerski

❖ My relative had an appointment in the city, and as she made her way to the car after the appointment, she noticed a ticket on the windshield. At first, she was quite upset, as she had made a point of ascertaining that the spot was legal. But then she told herself, "I did my hishtadlus [effort], I did what I had to do, and if this happened, then this is a test from Hashem, and I am not going to let it disturb me." When she got to the car, she read the ticket, and couldn't believe her eyes. It said, "TEST; this is not a ticket, do not pay." It was unbelievable; it was as though Hashem was speaking directly to her, informing her that this was really just a test. Since that day, my relative has kept the ticket as a constant reminder that Hashem is behind the scenes, testing us and hoping that we will become better people as a result.

As told by Rabbi David Ashear (Table Talk, Edition 379, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ When a person travels in an old, rickety wagon harnessed to an aged horse that can barely manage to pull it, the prospect of losing his way does not represent much of a threat to anyone but himself. Therefore, if he realizes that he has lost his way, he simply returns to the highway. This is not the case, however, if the one traveling is a wealthy businessman who has twenty huge wagons filled with heavy merchandise. If he loses his way, there is potential danger to the many who follow him. For the grooves caused by his laden wagons will be noticeable, and they will mistakenly believe it to be the correct one. As a result they will lose their way just as he did... When a simple man sins, said the Dubno Maggid, he must mend his ways and return to the upright path. This is not the case, however, when the sinner is a great man to whom others look for guidance. For then the damage wreaked is far more severe, as those who stray subsequently will assume that their misdeeds are correct and noble, and he will have caused the masses to stumble.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Freifeld's thoughts went to his talmidim first, and during his most difficult moments, their well-being was uppermost in his mind. In his last years, as he battled valiantly with illness. He was very often weak, and a bed was placed in his office. One night, as he lay there, racked with pain, every breath a struggle, Reb Raziel Stone noticed Rebbe motioning him over. He approached Rebbe who was murmuring something to him, exerting himself for each word. "If something happens to me, please don't have ta'anos, grievances on the Ribbono Shel Olam."

Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ When Rav Aharon was sick during his final illness when the Rebbetzin visited him in the hospital she tried to lift Reb Aharon's spirits by assuring, "Veit zein goot — things will be good." "Chalilah," replied the Rosh Yeshivah. "S'es shoin goot, it is already good, for all that God does is for the good."

Builders, By Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim Publishers

B. TO BE HAPPY WHEN HASHEM GIVES YESSURIM

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-11

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should greet trials and suffering (yisurim) with spiritual joy, as Scripture states: "It is joy to the righteous when justice is executed" (Mishlei 21:15), and King David proclaimed: "Of lovingkindness and justice will I sing" (Tehillim 101:1) — signifying: if Hashem bestows lovingkindness I will sing, and if He dispenses justice

I will likewise sing. Similarly, even when fleeing for his life from his son Avshalom, David opened his psalm not with a lamentation, but with a song of thanksgiving: "A psalm of David, when he fled from Avshalom his son" (Tehillim 3:1), because he recognized the hidden mercy within Hashem's righteous judgment.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 4)

In His boundless compassion, Hashem instituted the principle of "miktzas nefesh k'chol hanefesh" — a partial loss is accepted as if it were the whole. Through this chesed, even a minor hardship or physical distress — such as losing a small coin or suffering a minor scrape — is accepted by the Heavenly Court as an atonement for the entire soul.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In my father Rabbi Hirsch Diskind's final year in this world, he was speaking to my nephew about his perspective on pain. "You never want to ask Hashem for pain. However, when he subjects you to pain - Cherish it! It takes away so much pain in the world to come. It's like paying pennies on the dollar." Upon hearing this, my nephew exclaimed, "Zaide, you are such a tzadik!" My father responded "That's not a tzadik, anyone who understands the function of pain would feel the same way. But I will tell you what a tzadik is. "This story I heard in the name of the Chofetz Chaim. "Many years before the Chofetz Chaim there was a family whose father and older children were killed in a pogrom, Hashem should avenge their blood. The mother was able to escape into the forest with her little baby. Once in the forest the baby got ill and died. After burying her last child she stood up with her hands to Hashem and cried. "Hashem, you gave us such a difficult mitzvah to love You with all our heart. How difficult that was for me. I had a husband whom I loved, I had children whom I loved, how can I love You with all my heart. But now, Hashem, I have nobody left. Now, I can love You with all my entire heart. "Now that is a tzadik! "

Written by Paysach Diskind

C. TO APPRECIATE HASHEM'S MUSSAR

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-14

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should lovingly welcome Divine instruction and moral correction, as King Shlomo admonished: "The chastisement of Hashem, my son, do not despise, and do not dread His rebuke" (Mishlei 3:11).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the ways in which we can grow from suffering
- Discuss the question of why bad things happen to good people
- Discuss how the belief that all bad things come from Hashem and have a good purpose stems from our belief in the oneness of Hashem

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Yose ben Yoezer had a nephew, Yakum of Zeroros, who had become a Hellenist (he is identified with the Hellenist High Priest, Alkimus). Yakum was responsible for many cruel decrees against the Jews. His uncle, Yose ben Yoezer, was sentenced to death by crucifixion. On the way to execution, he encountered Yakum riding a horse on Shabbos. Yakum taunted him, "Look where your observance of Torah and mitzvos is taking you — look at the horse that my master is riding me upon (the honor and the power that I have), and the horse that your Master is riding you upon (to your death)." Yose explained, "If you, who angered God, and only did a few good deeds, are being rewarded with such honor and riches, imagine how much greater will be the reward (in the World to Come) of those who observe all of God's commandments... and if this is what is happening to me, how much greater will the punishment be for wicked people." Yakum repented and committed suicide. As Yose was about to be killed, he saw the soul of Yakum about to enter honorably into Gan Eden, and said, "In one short moment he preceded me to Gan Eden."

Bereishis Rabbah 65:22

❖ An incident occurred involving a student of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who traveled abroad and returned wealthy. The other disciples saw him and wished to leave for abroad as well. Rabbi Shimon knew this; he led them out to a valley facing Meron, his town, and prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and the valley filled with gold dinars. He said to them: 'Whoever wishes to take, let him take! But know that whoever takes now, it is from his portion in the World to Come that he takes, for the giving of Torah's reward is not in this world, but in the World to Come. As it is stated: "And she laughs at the final day" (Mishlei 31:25).' Hearing this, the disciples refrained and returned to the study hall.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Pekudei 7:2; Shemos Rabbah 52:3

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A certain peddler was accustomed to roaming from town to town and from city to city. He would purchase merchandise in one place and then travel to another place in order to sell it. In such a manner his days were spent, wandering from one place to the next. On one occasion, his friends met up with him and noticed that he was wearing a most gloomy countenance. "What's the matter?" they asked him. "Why do you look so depressed?" "My house was destroyed," he replied, "and I no longer have any place to return to. I will simply be forced to wander the roads..." "If that is the case," they asked, "then why are you so upset? Didn't you always wander the roads in any case?" "I certainly did," he responded. "However, I have always had the comfort of knowing that I had a home to return to where I could rest in tranquility if I so desired. But now, I am left with nothing, and I am forced to roam about..." This world, said the Chofetz Chaim, is but a vestibule leading to the World to Come. Each and every individual traverses this vestibule, but the righteous await the day when they will complete their "business" and will be able to return to their true home — the World to Come. The wicked, on the other hand, have no home to which they will ultimately return and must simply wander about.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ "Can you cash this check for me?" "Let me see the amount," replied the bank teller. When he saw the sum written on the check and the signature his eyes lit up with amazement. "I'm sorry, sir, but you'll have to consult the bank manager about cashing such a large check." Soon he was in the manager's office with his simple request. The bank manager studied the check and said to him: "There isn't enough money in this bank or in all the local banks put together to cash this check. Since the king himself has written you such a large check the only way you can receive payment for it is to travel to the capital and ask for cash at the royal treasury." The Mitzvos that a righteous person does are recorded by Eliyahu Hanovi and the

Messiah and signed by the King of Kings, Blessed be He. Such a check is so tremendous in value that it can only be paid in the King's capital, the World to Come. But a wicked man's Mitzvos are of much less value and can easily be cashed by the local bank in this world.

Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

ARROGANCE AND HUMILITY: ANAVAH & HARMONY

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to developing humility and avoiding arrogance. One of the primary definitions of the Torah's perspective on humility is to realize that one is not a superior or the center of the world, because one is simply a servant of the Creator. This attitude is the basis of humbly fulfilling Hashem's will which helps to perfect our character and come close to him.

17. Not to Be Arrogant (Humility)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-15

As it says "lest you eat and be satisfied ... and your heart will become haughty." (Devarim 8:12 Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to harbor arrogance or haughtiness of spirit (gasus haruach), as Scripture warns: "Lest you eat and become satisfied... and your heart become haughty, and you forget Hashem your God" (Devarim 8:12–14). Chazal severely censured the arrogant, stating that whoever is puffed up with pride is considered as if he engaged in idolatry, and is regarded by the Sages of the Talmud as someone placed under solemn excommunication (nidui).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The essence of humility is for us to realize that we are not lords, we are rather servants of Hashem, and Hashem is in charge. Humility therefore means to realize that we can't do whatever we want; we have to fulfill Hashem's will. It also means to realize that we aren't superior to anyone, because all of our gifts are just gifts from Hashem. It is also an attitude that one is not perfect and must always look to continue to grow. Additionally, it means to realize that the world does not have to go our way. It finally means that one should not spend their life pursuing recognition and caring what others think of them.

Humility leads to many godly virtues. Most of all, humility is an inspiration to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos which help to perfect our character and come close to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)

Arrogance (ga'avah) at its core means believing that one's talents, virtues, and accomplishments stem from oneself rather than being an unearned gift from the Creator. Arrogance manifests in haughty behavior: walking with affected slowness as if unbothered by anything, speaking cryptically or condescendingly, associating only with

select elites, demanding that others fear him, and remaining entirely blind to one's own faults.

SFAS EMES

• The Mishnah contrasts the disciples of Avraham with the disciples of Bilam: a good eye, lowly spirit, and humble soul on one side, and their opposites on the other. Ordinary arrogance needs no teacher; why call people who display it the disciples of Bilam? He answers that Bilam taught a more subtle distortion: even acts of submission could be calculated to produce status. Bilam could sincerely say that he was unable to transgress Hashem's command and yet describe enormous gifts and honor as if his own compliance were a great sacrifice on Hashem's behalf; his submission aimed toward renewed pride. By contrast, the humility Avraham teaches begins with the recognition that no creature possesses self-sufficient life. For the prohibition against arrogance this is a distinct explanation: the danger is not only overt conceit, but an ego that borrows the language of humility. True humility means recognizing that every talent, possession, and spiritual achievement we hold is a pure gift from Hashem (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Balak 5631).

• Rashi explains the cedar and hyssop in the purification of a metzora as a lesson to someone who became arrogant: he must lower himself like the hyssop. The answer is that the person must learn humility specifically from the height that tempted him. Even if he truly possesses extraordinary gifts or achievements, arrogance reveals that he has misunderstood their source: how can someone take pride in what is not his own? The distinction is unusually precise. Humility is not achieved by inventing a false description of oneself. Moshe knew that he was the source of daas for Israel, and still the Torah calls him supremely humble. He was humble because he knew that whatever wisdom, spiritual illumination, or capacity he possessed depended upon Hashem's divine life-force (chiyus). Here the central error is epistemic—misattributing a gift to oneself. The maamar is particularly useful for someone who is gifted or successful and needs a conception of humility (anavah) that does not require dishonesty about real strengths (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Metzora 5631).

• The midrash on a man of faiths is full of blessings — raises a disturbing question: why should blessing require faithfulness as its condition? If Hashem is good and desires to bestow good upon all His creatures, then withholding abundance until the recipient is trustworthy looks like a limitation on the Giver rather than a defect in the receiver. Yet the verse binds the two inseparably. The Sfas Emes resolves it through the psychology of receiving: through receiving, one can forget the One who bestows all good, and thus the receiving itself leads to sin. Only such a one can truly receive, for his taking is itself an act of cleaving to the Giver. The prohibition of arrogance is thus not a mere social virtue but the safeguard of the entire economy of blessing: without humility there can be no true receiving, and without receiving there can be no lasting blessing. Shabbos itself models the remedy: when all creation is nullified to its root it becomes a vessel that can hold blessing without bursting, which is why the verse binds blessing to the seventh day (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Pekudei 5636).

• Explaining the cedar and hyssop in the metzora's purification, the Sfas Emes asks why lowering oneself can repair an actual sin. If the offense had been a concrete deed, how can a change of posture or perspective be sufficient? He responds that arrogance is itself a deep root of wrongdoing. When a person experiences himself as autonomous, he ceases to recognize that his life and ability come from Hashem. This makes disobedience possible. Someone who perceived himself as an axe entirely dependent upon the hand that wields it could not regard rebellion as a form of genuine self-rule. Thus the rabbinic comparison of haughtiness with avodah zarah is

far more than an emphatic rebuke. The specific consequence is stability: reverent awe (yirah) preserves mitzvos the way a small addition preserves a much larger quantity of grain, making humility indispensable even where the deed is already substantial (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Chukas 5631).

• The patriarch Jacob, a moment before facing Esau, looks back on a lifetime of undeserved blessing and declares "I have become small from all the kindnesses." The midrash records a dispute: one Sage says Yaakov meant "I am unworthy," another that he meant "I am worthy." The difficulty is logical: if he felt unworthy, why ask for more? And if the declaration is mere modesty before the fact of having received so much, how could the receipt of grace itself make a man smaller — does not every gift enlarge the one who takes it? The Sfas Emes, transmitting the teaching of the Lublin Seer, reads the paradox as the very criterion of authentic kindness: from every kindness one must come to humility and shame, through understanding that one merits nothing and everything is His grace alone — and this is the sign that it is true kindness. This is why the Holy One delays His gifts to the righteous: only when the vessel is repaired fit to receive well — can the good be poured without damage; the wicked receive at once, boast, and fall to the nethermost pit (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5635).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the definition of Humility and how it has nothing to do with not having self esteem
- Discuss all of the ways that humility makes you into a better person
- Discuss the idea raised in the Chovos Halevavos that humility is the foundation of all good middos and all of the mitzvos
- Discuss how to develop humility

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The emperor's daughter once mocked R' Yehoshua, saying, "O glorious wisdom in an ugly vessel!" R' Yehoshua said, "Doesn't your father keep wine in vessels of earthenware?" She asked. "Where else should he keep it?" He said. "You who are of the nobility should keep it in vessels of gold and silver." She told this to her father, and he had the wine placed into vessels of gold and silver and it got spoiled. When the emperor was informed of this he asked his daughter who gave her such advice, whereupon she responded, "R' Yehoshua ben Chananiah." The emperor summoned R' Yehoshua and asked him, "Why did you give her such advice?" He replied, "I answered her according to her manner of speaking to me.

Talmud Bavli, Taanis 7a

❖ To illustrate Moshe's blessing to the Tribe of Asher, 'And he shall dip his foot in oil' (Devarim 33:24), the Sages told an astonishing true story: Once the city of Laodicea ran short of olive oil, so they appointed a special purchasing agent (polimotos) and told him: 'Go buy us one million (a hundred myriads) dinars' worth of olive oil!' The agent traveled to Jerusalem, where the merchants told him: 'Go to Tyre.' In Tyre they told him: 'Go to Gush Chalav in the territory of Asher!' When he arrived in Gush Chalav and asked for the man who could supply a million dinars' worth of oil, the townspeople pointed him to a specific house. He knocked, and they told him: 'He is out working in his olive field.' Expecting a grand aristocrat surrounded by servants, the agent walked out to the orchard and found a simple Jew in work clothes digging around his olive trees with his own hands! The agent asked in disbelief: 'Do you really have a million dinars' worth of oil?' 'Yes,' said the farmer, 'wait until I finish my work.' When evening came, the farmer slung his tools over his shoulder, walked the agent back to his home while clearing stones from the public road along the way, washed his hands and feet in warm

water, and measured out for him the entire million dinars' worth of pure olive oil — and then asked: 'Do you happen to need any more?' In fact, he had so much more oil that the agent had to hire every pack animal in the Land of Israel to haul it back to Laodicea, fulfilling the blessing: 'Asher shall dip his foot in oil!'

Sifrei Devarim 355:24 (on Devarim 33:24)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Munish was a humble, G-d-fearing tailor in the town of Moglinitz whose craftsmanship was so renowned that even the local nobility patronized his shop, and he gave generously to tzedakah. One day, the fearsome local poritz (feudal lord) arrived in a four-horse carriage with costly English wool and Far Eastern silk, warning Munish that if he tailored them well he would become the official court tailor—but if he ruined them, he would be reduced to sewing rags for life. With humble prayers, Munish sewed magnificent garments. Appointed tailor to the court, he grew wealthy and honored in the community—until pride quietly crept into his heart and he began thinking, "I am the greatest tailor in the land, and all this honor is my due!" Before a grand banquet for nobles from across the region, the poritz ordered Munish to sew formal attire for his entire household to rival the finest fashions of Paris and Vienna. Self-assured, Munish completed the garments, but when the poritz and his family tried them on, every single piece hung crookedly and fit terribly! Livid with rage, the poritz hurled the pile of clothes at Munish: "You dare humiliate me before the nobility, Jew?! Fix every garment before the banquet, or I will have you hanged from the highest tree!" Crushed and baffled—for his measurements had been exact and he had no idea how to alter them—Munish ran weeping to the chassidic master Rav Chaim Meir Yechiel, the 'Saraf' of Moglinitz. "Listen carefully and follow my instructions without deviating a hairsbreadth," the Saraf told him. "Return to your shop, rip open every seam on all the garments, and then sew them back together along the exact same seam lines!" Though bewildered as to how resewing the identical seams could change the fit, the brokenhearted tailor stayed up weeping over the delicate fabrics, undoing and resewing every stitch while pouring out his heart to Hashem for his life. Trembling, Munish delivered the garments back to the palace—and to his amazement, the poritz exclaimed in delight that he had never worn clothes that fit so royally, rewarding Munish with a handsome bonus! When the astonished tailor returned to ask the Saraf how the identical seams now fit to perfection, the tzaddik smiled: "Middos are not mere abstractions, Munish; a person's inner spirit enters the work of his hands. When arrogance entered your heart, that ugliness permeated the garments and made them unwearable. Once you undid the stitches and resewed those very same seams with tears of brokenhearted humility, the grace of humility entered the garments and made them radiant!"

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ Rabbi Asher Zelig Rubenstein zt"l, a Rosh Yeshivah of great repute, led Yeshivas Toras Simchah of Yerushalayim in the year 2000 when the following incident occurred. Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l gave a shiur to a select group of kollel avreichim, and Rav Asher Zelig very much wanted to join that chabura. When he asked Rav Moshe to accept him, Rav Moshe initially refused. However, after much insistence on Rav Asher Zelig's part, Rav Moshe conceded. Rav Asher Zelig was naturally the oldest member of the chabura and certainly the most prestigious. The gap between his age and Rav Moshe's was much smaller than the gap between him and the other avreichim. Rav Moshe had an extremely strong kpeida (concern, issue) about the disturbance caused by cell phones. He made it very clear to the members of the shiur that the shiur was offered only on the condition that there would be absolutely no cell phones in the room. It was not sufficient to simply turn off the phone -- he insisted that there should be no phones should at all. On this fateful day, in the middle of the shiur, a cell phone rang. Rav Moshe stopped, looked up, but said nothing. A few moments later, the phone rang again, and once more he stopped. When it rang a third time, Rav Moshe closed his Gemara and said that he could no longer continue the shiur. The silence in the room was palpable. At this point, Rav Asher Zelig got up, went to the back of the room, took the phone, shut it off, and apologized to Rav Moshe. Rav Moshe then asked him if it was his phone. Rav Asher Zelig again apologized and promised that it would not happen again. When Rav Moshe realized that it was Rav Asher Zelig's phone, he told the group

that, considering who Rav Asher Zelig was, he would overlook the incident and continue giving the shiur. In 2013, at the shiva for Rav Asher Zelig, one of the visitors related this story to the family who had never heard it before. The visitor, one of the avreichim in that chabura, shared how Rav Asher Zelig had saved the shiur from being dissolved. He then went on to reveal that, in truth, it had been his phone that rang. At the time of the incident, he had been too embarrassed to publicly admit it, so he remained silent. Rav Asher Zelig never shared this incident with anyone. His wife knew nothing of it, nor did she know that her husband had taken the embarrassment upon himself to protect the avreich. Fortunate is the one who serves Hashem with modesty. May his memory be a blessing.

As told by Paysach Diskind by Rav Asher Zelig's son-in-law

❖ The Ridvaz was Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky (1845 - 1913), a world-renowned Talmudic scholar and community leader. He is best known for his monumental commentaries on the Talmud Yerushalmi, which are printed in nearly all standard editions. His life followed a path from Eastern Europe through several major American and Israeli cities: Born in Russia, he served as the Chief Rabbi of several major communities, most notably Slutsk, Poland, where he founded a prominent yeshivah. He first arrived in America in 1900 to raise funds for his publications. In 1903, he was elected Zekan ha-Rabbanim (Elder Rabbi) by the United Orthodox Rabbis of America at a meeting in Philadelphia. He was appointed Chief Rabbi of the United Orthodox Congregations of Chicago in September 1903. His time there was marked by struggles to reform kosher supervision and Jewish education. Frustrated by the state of religious life in America, he moved to Tzfas in 1905. There, he established the Toras Eretz Yisrael yeshivah. Rav Chaim Kanievsky recounts that once, the Chazon Ish was in Tzfas, and he met an older person who was there during the time that the Ridvaz was there as well. The Chazon Ish asked the man to repeat an interesting or impressive story that he could remember. The old man thought for a moment and then said that on Shabbos Shuvah, the entire city had shown up at his shul to hear the Ridvaz's words. Knowing how great the attendance would be, people arrived early; not only was the building already full, but the crowd was overflowing. When the Ridvaz showed up wrapped in a tallis, he noticed that the only way he would be able to reach the podium was to force people to squeeze themselves together, which would inconvenience many people. What was he to do? The Ridvaz went around to the front of the building, where he knew that there was a tiny window that he could squeeze himself through. The people in the shul, close to the podium, all watched him squeezing himself through the small window. All of this was done in order to ease the burden on everyone else. Rav Chaim adds that the Chazon Ish was so excited about this story that he repeated it the entire day to every person who approached him.

From Experience Greatness by Rabbi Moshe Hubner

❖ From time to time, Rav Aharon Kotler traveled to Cleveland on behalf of his yeshivah in Lakewood. Rav Bloch would accompany him on his visits to elicit funds, despite the responsibility he bore for maintaining his own yeshivah. Several surprised supporters asked Rav Bloch how he, as a Rosh Yeshivah responsible for maintaining his own institution, could help raising funds for a different yeshivah. Surely this would harm his yeshivah! Rav Bloch replied; "My task in life is to sanctify Heavens Name What difference does it make if this happens through my yeshivah or through Reb Aharon's? The main thing is to sanctify Hashem Yisbarach's Name"

In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ R' Dovid Katz recalled that one day in Kfar Saba, some students saw R' Aharon Leib Steinman mixing cement and laying bricks, assisting construction workers who were extending the yeshivah building. Assuming that R' Aharon Leib was trying to save the yeshivah money, R' Katz offered to take his place and help the workers. R' Aharon Leib smiled and told him that it was his mitzvah of building in Eretz Yisrael, as the Ramban writes, "that there is a mitzvah to build Eretz Yisrael in contemporary times." On another occasion, a parent of a young son asked R' Aharon Leib, "Wouldn't it be more appropriate for a rebbi, rather than a morah, to teach boys in the younger grades? With a rebbi, the little boys could start

learning as soon as they begin attending yeshivah." R' Aharon Leib replied, "In the youngest grades, women can teach as much content as men, and do it with more warmth. Having the children nurtured by the warmth of a morah is very important at that time."

From Rav Aharon Leib, By Naftali Weinberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Many stories have been told about the modesty and greatness of Hagaon Hatzaddik Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l. Although Rav Moshe, the Rosh Yeshivah of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim, was internationally recognized as the gadol hador, he was truly an anav. The following story illustrating Rav Moshe's humility was told to Rabbi David Ozeiry, one of the Roshei Kehillah of Yeshivat Ateret Torah in Brooklyn, New York, by a businessman named Phil. Phil grew up in Brooklyn in a non-religious family. As he grew older, Phil met many Orthodox Jews and was impressed with what he saw and heard. Slowly but surely, Phil started doing more and more mitzvos. Over time, he became fascinated by the unbelievable stories that he heard from so many different people concerning one special tzaddik by the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein. He decided he just had to meet this man whom everyone was talking about. Early one Sunday morning, Phil drove down to Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim on the Lower East Side of New York. He got there in time for Shacharis and joined the minyan in the Beis Hamedrash. The yeshivah was packed. In the front row, he noticed about twenty men with long, white beards. There were hundreds of men and boys sitting and standing throughout the Beis Hamedrash. Dozens of men were walking about, collecting tzedakah for poor families, needy brides, sick relatives, and other causes. Phil was entranced. He had never seen such a sight before. But as he looked around the room, he was still confused. Where was this amazing tzaddik, Rav Moshe, whom he had come to see? Phil stopped one of the bachurim and asked, "Could you please point out Rav Moshe Feinstein to me?" "Sure," replied the bachur. "He's the man standing over there." Phil felt his knees getting weak. "I can't believe it!" he cried. "Do you know what just happened?" Phil continued, "The man you just pointed out to me came over to me after davening and stretched out his hand. I thought he was collecting tzedakah, so I instinctively put a quarter in his hand. He gave me a warm smile, thanked me, put the quarter in his pocket, and walked away. He didn't even tell me he was Rav Moshe! Now I realize he was coming over to me to say Shalom Aleichem. Never for a second did his face show any signs of insult that I did not give him the respect he deserves. He didn't embarrass me by telling me his name, and if I hadn't asked, I would never have known!" After his personal encounter with Rav Moshe that day, all the stories that Phil had heard about this tzaddik took on new meaning. He now clearly had a glimpse of the true greatness of Rav Moshe Feinstein.

For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The following is a beautiful story about the Gerrer Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem. His son, Rav Shaul Alter, visited Baltimore this week. Sometimes, true greatness is measured not by what one does, but rather by what one refrains from doing. The following moving story illustrates this: It was a large asifah for chizuk haTorah. The main scheduled speaker was the venerated Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Sfas Emes, Rav Pinchos Menachem Alter. As the Rosh Yeshivah was called upon to speak, he seemed preoccupied. He was searching his pockets for something. With a look of embarrassment on his face, he began to speak -- not with the usual smooth tone of the polished, inspired speaker that he was, but rather hesitatingly, while still fumbling through his pockets. Finally, he turned to the large crowd and apologized, explaining that he seemed to have misplaced the notes he had prepared in advance of the speech and would therefore suffice with a short vort that he would say from memory. What had really happened? The distinguished person who had spoken before the Rebbe had clearly not been prepared, and his derashah was not well received. The Rebbe felt that if he were to follow with an eloquent, powerful, well-prepared derashah, it would reflect even more negatively on the previous speaker. Thus, he was willing to embarrass himself rather than cause inadvertent shame and chalishas hadaas to that speaker. When he was later asked how he could have withheld much-needed chizuk from an entire tzibbur because of this, he replied, "It is not possible for one's avodas Hashem to become elevated when that elevation comes at the expense of another's feelings."

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One Friday, Rav Yaakov Edelstein (the chief rabbi of Ramat HaSharon who was the brother of the Ponevitch Rosh Yeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein) traveled to Bnei Brak for Shabbos. The taxi driver who came to drive him from his house in Ramat HaSharon was shirtless and wearing shorts. Rav Edelstein didn't say a word. On the contrary, when they arrived at their destination in Bnei Brak, in the neighborhood of Ne'ot Yosef the driver helped Rav Edelstein carry his things up the stairs to the apartment where he would be staying. Afterward, they went back downstairs, and Rav Edelstein turned to the driver and asked, in front of the surprised gazes of passersby and neighbors, that the driver give him a brachah before Shabbos. It was a sight to see. There, in the heart of Bnei Brak, stood the elderly, prominent Rav, his head bent under the hands of a taxi driver from Ramat HaSharon who looked like he had just left the beach. The sight was so incongruous that several minutes afterward, the driver was surrounded by neighbors who came to him asking for a brachah as well. "If Rav Edelstein asked for a brachah," they said, "we want one, too."

From Reaching To Heaven By Yedidya Meir and Sivan Rahav-Meir, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, otherwise known as Reb Itzele Peterburger, was one of the leading masters of Mussar, and one of the primary disciples of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. At a young age, Reb Itzele became known as a great Torah scholar. He was once invited to join a rabbinical conference alongside the great Torah luminaries of his generation. At that conference, the Beis HaLevi, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, presented a very difficult question in Gemara, which led to a heated debate among the rabbis. When no one could find a solution, the Beis HaLevi proceeded to deliver a brilliant answer. Everyone in attendance was in awe. Then, the Beis HaLevi asked his renowned son, Reb Chaim, for an answer. Remarkably, Reb Chaim offered a solution even more brilliant than his father's. The rabbis were amazed. Later that day, the Beis HaLevi reflected on the conference and wondered why Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer had remained silent the entire time. He had heard that Rabbi Blazer was a great scholar, but it had not been apparent. Curious, he went to the bookshelf and pulled out Pri Yitzchak, a sefer on Gemara authored by Rabbi Blazer. Turning to the pages discussing the very topic he had raised earlier that day, the Beis HaLevi was astonished to discover that not only had Rabbi Blazer posed the same question, but he had also recorded both answers that were suggested during the conference. This is true humility. Rabbi Blazer did not want to take honor away from the Beis HaLevi or shift the spotlight onto himself. Instead, he chose to remain silent, keeping his wisdom between him and Hashem. This made him even greater -- and Hashem even prouder. The more we acquire this beautiful trait, the more peace of mind it will bring us.

As told by Rabbi David Ashear (Table Talk, Edition 429, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner)

❖ Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky and Rav Yitzchok Hutner were two of the greatest leaders in the American Jewish community of the past generation. Their respect and adoration for each other is beyond description. With this in mind please appreciate the following incident. Zalman Diskind, my father's brother, celebrated his vort in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Among the attending dignitaries were Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky, the father in law of his brother, and Rav Yitzchok Hutner, his Rosh Yeshivah. After the vort Reb Yaakov, Rav Hutner and my father decided to take a taxi together back to Brooklyn. Reb Yaakov was returning home to Williamsburg and Rav Hutner and my father were returning to Flatbush. After the taxi crossed the bridge to Brooklyn, Reb Yaakov began telling the driver how to best navigate the streets of Williamsburg. The problem was that many streets in Williamsburg are one-way and one must sometimes take a street in the opposite direction to get to the desired street. Rav Hutner felt that it was beneath the dignity of such a great Rabbi to be giving driving directions to a taxi driver. He expressed his disappointment to Reb Yaakov for lowering his stature by being involved in the driving duties of this taxi driver. Reb Yaakov responded; "The great Shmuel, in the Gemara, knew the wisdom of astronomy. In describing his familiarity with astronomy he would say 'I know the paths of heaven like the streets of Nahardaha'. Evidently, even someone as great as Shmuel can know the street system of the city in which he lives and be proud of it."

As told by Paysach Diskind who heard it from his father

❖ There is a well-known story from the days before the Beis Yisrael became Rebbe that illustrates his proficiency in the art of "hiding himself." Reb Simchah Bunim was visiting Netanya, together with his brother, the Beis Yisrael. The Beis Yisrael asked the Klausenberger Rebbe if he wanted to "know" his younger brother. He led him to the room of the Lev Simchah, and told him to look in through the keyhole. The Lev Simchah sat, surrounded by sefarim, engrossed in his learning. They knocked on the door, and the Lev Simchah called out, "Just one moment." When they entered, they saw that the table was bare of sefarim, with an open copy of the Hamodia newspaper in their place.

Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In his great humility, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld would avoid troubling even young children wherever possible. When R' Chaim went to take his seat at the head table at his granddaughter's wedding, he found a youngster innocently seated at the edge of the bench, inadvertently preventing anyone else from taking a seat. R' Chaim remained standing, unwilling to disturb and possibly embarrass the thoughtless child. The boy's Father, however, quickly realized what was happening and began to scold his hapless son. "No, no!" pleaded R' Chaim softly, "How could I disturb a child who might one day be a great man in Israel, something which it is too late for me to become."

Guardian of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, By Rabbi Hillel Danziger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 128

❖ R' Hershel Mashinsky met the Klausenberger Rebbe in 1946 on the Rebbe's first trip to America. After observing the Rebbe's avodah, he attached himself to the Rebbe with every fiber of his being. During the initial period after the Rebbe's marriage, he lived in a tiny apartment on Rodney Street in Williamsburg. R' Hershel came to visit one brutally hot summer day and noticed that there was only one fan in the kitchen. Feeling the terrible heat, R' Hershel took the fan from the kitchen and brought it to where the Rebbe was sitting. "Please bring it back to the kitchen," the Rebbe gently asked R' Hershel, who was at the age of shidduchim at the time. "You know," the Rebbe continued, "you will soon be married. Chazal teach us that one must honor one's wife more than himself. Please put the fan back in the kitchen so that the Rebbetzin will be more comfortable." R' Shimon, a chassid, similarly recalled: It was during the summer when the Rebbe was in the Klausenburger camp in the Catskills. I entered his room in the small, spartan bungalow. There I saw the Rebbe sitting at his table, learning in front of a Gemara, literally shivering with cold. It was early in the morning, and the country air was cold. I couldn't bear seeing the Rebbe suffering like that, so I ran home, where I had a heater, and brought it to the Rebbe's bungalow. The Rebbe gave me a big yasher koach. Then he rose from his chair and said, "I am bringing this to the Rebbetzin so that she shouldn't be cold." "But Rebbe!" I protested. "It is the Rebbe who is shivering." The Rebbe refused to listen. He brought the heater into the Rebbetzin's room, turned it on, tiptoed back out, and sat down in front of the Gemara again, shivering as he learned.

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A man arrived in a big city and began to meander about its streets. Along the way, he came to a street of the most majestic homes he had ever seen. One of the homes particularly impressed him with its beauty, and he therefore decided to enter and get a glimpse of its interior. The man knocked on the heavy oak door. When it was opened, he was greeted by the sight of a genuine palace. Expensive rugs lined the floor, crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling, and elegant furniture adorned each room. The servant received him dressed in a lavish white uniform with gold buttons. "Who is the owner of this beautiful home?" inquired the visitor. The servant arrogantly stuck out his chest and responded, "It is my house! Look around — everything that you see is mine! I am the owner of this house!" The door suddenly swung open and in walked the true homeowner. He had overheard his servant's lies and was decidedly livid. Humiliated, the servant hurried from the room. When a person is haughty, said the Dubno Maggid, it is an indication that he has forgotten that Hashem is the true Master of the world!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A certain Jewish tailor who lived not far from Pshischah was very much in demand with the fashion-conscious dandies among the gentile nobility. One such paritz bought himself a length of material in Paris, and on his return told the tailor: "This fabric is very expensive, so make sure that the cloak comes out as well as such a fabric deserves." The tailor laughed out loud, and protested: "Sir, why do you say such a thing? Am I not known to be the most expert tailor in the entire province?" When in due course he brought back the completed garment, the squire tried it on - and at once began (with the help of his raucous henchmen) to abuse the poor tailor, claiming that he had ruined the precious fabric. They drove him violently out of the household, and for good measure threw the hapless garment after him in disgust. In a short time, needless to say, the wretched fellow found himself out of favor and out of work. One day his wife said: "Look here! Everyone who is in trouble travels to town to speak to Reb Yerachmiel, the son of the Yid HaKadosh of Pshischah. Take my advice and do the same." To cut a long story short, this is what Reb Yerachmiel advised him: "Undo all the stitches in the cloak, then sew it together again with the very same stitches, and bring the garment to the paritz." In his heart of hearts, the tailor scoffed a little at this piece of advice, but he had no alternative, so he followed it. He brought the reconstituted cloak to the squire, who called his wife in to give her opinion too. They were both so pleased with his handiwork that they apologized for their earlier treatment of him, and even affirmed their goodwill by adding to the agreed fee. The little man was stupefied. He came back and told the tzaddik, who explained as follows: "When you came here last, I could tell that when you made the cloak the first time you had made it out of arrogance - and arrogance is a graceless thing. That's why they didn't like your work. By the time you came here I saw that you were considerably more humble, and that's why I told you to undo the arrogant stitches and to sew the cloak anew - in humility, for then it would acquire grace."

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 189

❖ Reb Boruch Ber suggested that one who returns to America should have semichah (rabbinical ordination). Nosson Meir Wachtfogel replied that he had already received semichah from several renowned rabbanim and roshei yeshivah, including Rabbi Shkop and Rabbi Leizer Yudel Finkel, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah. After looking over these semichos, Reb Boruch Ber told Nosson Meir, "These will never do. I will write you an even more glowing one!" In later years, the Mashgiach was asked what Reb Boruch Ber had written in the semichah. Reb Nosson responded that he did not know; he had never read it! When asked if the Mashgiach wasn't curious as to the wording of the semichah, Reb Nosson explained, "Why should I look at it? I know who I really am!"

Torah Leaders, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ R' Chaim Yitzchak Eizek Sher was the son-in-law of the Alter of Slabodka. He had remained in Europe, serving as rosh yeshivah in the Slabodka branch of the yeshivah, and he first arrived in Eretz Yisrael in 1942. He would eventually open the Slabodka Yeshivah in Bnei Brak, but until the time was right, he lived in Yerushalayim and davened at Chevron Yeshivah. Young Baruch Mordchai Ezrachi, raised to cherish the Torah of Slabodka, tried to absorb as much as he could from R' Eizek. R' Eizek took notice of the young man, and one morning he invited Baruch Ezrachi to walk him home. They walked from Rechov Chaggai to R' Eizek's home on nearby Rechov Yonah, but when they reached the apartment, R' Eizek suddenly turned and made his way back to yeshivah, as if he had forgotten something. When they reached the yeshivah, he turned around, heading back toward his home. The bachur was bewildered, but he was confident that R' Eizek's every step was precise and deliberate. The third time R' Eizek turned around, Baruch finally asked why they were retracing their steps. R' Eizek, a man of impressive comportment and regal bearing, looked down at the bachur walking next to him. Keeping his eyes trained on the young man, R' Eizek resumed walking yet again, and this time he called out, "Nit azoi geit a general." That is not how a general walks. R' Eizek was teaching the bachur how to walk, how a ben Torah is meant to carry himself! Baruch Ezrachi squared his shoulders and straightened his back as they walked, once again, toward R' Eizek's home. This time R' Eizek parted from him and entered the apartment, the message conveyed.

From Reb Baruch Mordche, By R' Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ To be humble does not mean to think of oneself as a person without ability or accomplishment. Moshe Rabbeinu surely recognized that he was the greatest prophet who ever lived; after all, it was he whom Hashem had chosen to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt and transmit the Torah at Sinai. The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, explains, humility, is the ability to recognize that "all one's intellect, emotions, and skills are not his own, but are loaned to him for a specific amount of time by Hashem, Who created him and Who will take back these gifts when the time comes. This can be compared to a poor man who has borrowed a rich man's clothing to wear at a festive gathering, The poor man will not pride himself over these garments, and look down at the way others are dressed because he knows that they do not belong to him and that tomorrow he must return them"

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld was once late in returning home from Shacharis. Since he was a very punctual person, his wife was somewhat concerned and sent their daughter, Rachel Breindel, to search for him. She found her father drawing water from a well and pouring it into pitchers which two little boys, six and seven years old, then carried to their home nearby' The boys would empty the water into a large earthen barrel and hurriedly return to have their pitchers refilled. "Father!" exclaimed the shocked girl. "Have you become the local water-carrier?" "No," replied R' Chaim, "but as I was returning from shul I noticed these two boys leaning dangerously over the well trying to draw water. When I asked them why they were doing such a dangerous thing, they explained that they had no water at home and that there was no money to hire a water-carrier. Their father, a poor talmid chacham, is confined to bed with a severe case of the Flu and their mother has just given birth, When I heard this, I quickly took off my talis and tefillin and began drawing water for them' And I will continue doing so until they have filled their water barrel," "But what will people think when they see such a great talmid chacham as yourself engaged in such an undignified activity?" retorted the girl. "Think of what would be said in Heaven if I were to sit and eat a leisurely breakfast while Jewish children are endangering their lives to bring a few drops of water to their sick parents," replied R' Chaim.

Guardian of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 126

❖ There was a meeting of leading roshei yeshivah at the Brooklyn office of one of the askanim. Because the organizers knew that a gathering of prominent gedolim in Boro Park would inevitably attract attention and create a commotion, there was security at the door, ensuring that only invited participants could enter the building. Reb Dovid arrived in his short jacket, carrying a shopping bag with the groceries he had just purchased, and he was turned away at the door. "It is only for rabbis," he was informed. He smiled and shrugged. "Please, if you don't mind, can you go tell them that Dovid Feinstein is here?"

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ "A story told of R' Shmelke of Nikolsburg offers an entirely different perspective on the requirement to equate others' honor with one's own. When R' Shmelke assumed his rabbinical position, the community held a welcoming reception. Before entering the hall, he requested the use of a side room. Much to their disbelief, his congregants overheard him talking to himself in his room, saying, "Welcome, honored rabbi; it is our pleasure to have such a genius grace our city," and similar expressions of welcome and praise. When the Rebbe emerged, the notables of the community, somewhat nonplussed, asked him to explain his strange behavior. He said: "I am aware that I will soon hear accolades similar to those I just repeated to myself I wanted to get the feeling of how meaningless such honor really is. I therefore followed the words of the Sages: 'Let the honor given you by your friends and colleagues have the same value and be as [meaningless and ludicrous to you as] the honor you accord yourself.'.

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The chassidic master R' Naftali of Ropschitz was known for his witticisms. Chassidim knew that each of his clever remarks was a profound teaching. R' Naftali said, "I never understood why the Midrash refers to the yetzer hara as being a fool. It seems to me that the yetzer hara is very sly and cunning, and hardly a fool. "One winter night I wished to immerse myself in the mikveh. However, the pond was frozen, and when I broke the ice and wished to enter, the yetzer hara said to me, 'Naftali, are you mad? You will be endangering your health by going into the freezing water. Go home!' "I almost fell prey to his seductive logic. However, I gathered strength and defiantly jumped into the freezing water. No sooner had I done so than the yetzer hara said, 'See what a great tzaddik you are, Naftali! You were willing to sacrifice your health in order to purify yourself in the mikveh.' "It was then that I understood why the Talmud refers to the yetzer hara as a fool. After all, he could have waited to provoke my vanity until after I had emerged from the pond. What point was there in his jumping into the freezing water together with me? Indeed, he must be a fool." A very clever witticism. But what R' Naftali is pointing out to us is that the yetzer hara does not delay for even a fraction of a second. It will take advantage of every possible situation in order to lead a person to sin or to cause him character degeneration such as vanity. With an enemy that is so ubiquitous, we must constantly be on the alert.

Rebbes and Chassidim, By Rabbi Abraham J. Twersky, p. 131

❖ Someone who assisted Reb Moshe Feinstein for a number of years once asked him, "Why does the Rosh Yeshivah permit phone calls to disturb his learning at all hours of the day? Would it not be more practical to accept calls at specific hours only?" - Reb Moshe replied, "There is a trace of arrogance in telling someone that I cannot be disturbed and he must call me back at my convenience. That is not for me."

Reb Moshe, Expanded Edition, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. EVEN A KING OR GREAT PERSON SHOULD NOT BE HAUGHTY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-16

As it says "And his heart should not become haughty" (Devarim 17:20, Parshas Shoftim).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture warns concerning the monarch: 'That his heart not be lifted up above his brethren' (Devarim 17:20, Parshas Shoftim). Through this negative commandment, we are admonished to uproot the destructive trait of arrogance (ga'avah) from our souls. A person of stature or superior standing must never conduct himself haughtily toward those of lesser rank; rather, even an exalted king is commanded to cultivate true humility (anavah). As King David testified of himself: 'Hashem, my heart was not haughty, nor were my eyes lofty' (Tehillim 131:1).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Rebbi) lived in Tzippori in the Land of Israel for seventeen years, applying to himself the verse (Bereishis 47:28): 'And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years'—'And Judah lived in Tzippori seventeen years!' Rebbi was exceedingly humble and used to say: 'Whatever any person asks of me I am ready to do—and furthermore, if Rav Huna the Exilarch (Reish Galuta) were to ascend from Babylonia to the Land of Israel, I would seat him above me, for he descends from the tribe of Judah through the male line while I descend through the female line!' One day Rabbi Chiya the Great entered and said to him: 'Behold, Rav Huna is outside!' Rebbi's face turned pale, thinking Rav Huna had arrived alive

to assume the office, until Rabbi Chiya explained: 'It is his coffin that has been brought up to be buried in the Land of Israel!'... After thirteen years during which Rebbi's toothache protected all expectant mothers in the Land of Israel, Eliyahu HaNavi appeared in the likeness of Rabbi Chiya the Great, laid his finger upon Rebbi's tooth, and healed it immediately, inspiring Rebbi to accord Rabbi Chiya even greater honor. Once, Rabbi Yishmael ben Rabbi Yose complained to Rebbi: 'I saw Rabbi Chiya in the bathhouse and he did not even bow or acknowledge me!' When Rebbi asked Rabbi Chiya why he had not noticed him, Rabbi Chiya replied: 'I swear that while I was bathing, my eyes were cast down and my mind was completely absorbed in reviewing the entire Book of Psalms and its aggadic commentary, so I never even saw him!' From that moment on, Rebbi assigned two disciples to walk beside Rabbi Chiya in the steam of the bathhouse so he would not stumble.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Kilayim 9:3 (32b; cf. Talmud Yerushalmi, Kesubos 12:3)

B. NOT TO PURSUE FAME

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-11

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught (Pirkei Avos 4:21): 'Envy (kinah), physical lust (ta'avah), and the pursuit of honor (kavod) drive a person out of the world.' This severe admonition encompasses both realms of existence: unchecked ambition and the thirst for acclaim ruin a person's physical and emotional life in this world, and ultimately forfeit his eternal portion in the World to Come (Olam HaBa).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)

The pursuit of honor (kavod) is one of the most destructive drives in human nature. It destroyed figures of immense stature such as Yerovam, Korach, and the Spies. If not for the craving for social status, a person would be content with simple, peaceful living. The pursuit of honor blinds a person from being a faithful servant of Hashem. True and enduring honor belongs solely to the soul that cleaves to the Almighty.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Our Sages taught: When a wealthy person appears before the Heavenly Court for judgment and is asked: 'Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah?' If he says: 'I was wealthy and preoccupied with my properties,' they say to him: 'Were you wealthier than Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom?' They said of Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom that his father left him an inheritance of one thousand cities on land and corresponding to them, one thousand ships at sea. Yet each and every day, he would hoist a measure of flour upon his shoulder and travel from city to city and region to region to study Torah. Once, his own laborers encountered him on the road and impressed him into forced labor (angaria). He pleaded with them: 'I beg of you, release me and let me go study Torah!' They replied: 'By the life of Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom our master, we will not release you!' In all his days, he never went to inspect his vast estates; instead, he sat and occupied himself with Torah all the day and all the night.

Talmud Bavli, Yoma 35b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Although Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman despised kavod and frequently spoke out against those who seek it, he was very clear that if someone is offered a position in which he could positively impact others, such as becoming a maggid shiur or board member of a yeshivah, the person should take it, as the verse says: "Shame? Shomer mitzvah lo yeida davar ra -— If someone is doing a mitzvah, harm will not befall him." However, he has to work on himself to erase from his mind all the kavod he receives from that position. About four years before R' Aharon Leib's petirah, a maggid shiur in a yeshivah ketanah came during kabbalas kahal to discuss a time-sensitive question with him. The man had been offered a position in a prestigious yeshivah gedolah and was unsure whether to accept it or to continue teaching younger students. "Are you satisfied in your current position?" R' Aharon Leib asked. "What would be your reason to switch jobs and teach older students?" "To tell you the truth," the maggid shiur replied, "I am happy with my job, but since I will get more kavod if I teach in a yeshivah gedolah, I'm contemplating making the switch." R' Aharon Leib's face lit up with a huge smile at his answer. "I have special respect for you," he said, "as you are a truthful person. I get questions very similar to yours several times a month, but they are phrased in a roundabout way. The underlying reasoning behind such questions always relates directly to kavod, yet the questioners are untruthful both with themselves and with me. Rather than admitting what lies at the root of their question, they come up with myriad ways to package their question so that it doesn't seem related to kavod. You, however, tell the truth. While you really should work to eradicate your need to pursue honor, many others would do well to learn from your honesty." R' Aharon Leib spent a few more minutes speaking to the maggid shiur. At the conclusion of their discussion, in deference to his honesty, he even accompanied him out the door to the outside steps."

From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A rich man suffered from acute insomnia. Night after night, he lay awake in bed, as worries gnawed at his heart and did not permit him to relax. What worried him so? The rich man was a merchant who sold diamonds and other precious gems. Naturally, he stored a massive amount of gems and cash in his home. "Indeed," thought the rich man to himself, "my money and gems are hidden inside a large and sturdy sate; but what will be if a thief enters my home and terrorizes me into opening the safe? What will I do then?" This thought disturbed him greatly, and he tossed and turned, unable to sleep. One night, the rich man leaped from his bed in a state of joy, thinking that he had resolved his problem. He hired an expert safe maker, who constructed a wall within the safe. Behind the wall, the rich man hid most of his wealth, leaving only a small amount of cash and inexpensive gems in the actual safe. "If a thief will come now, G-d forbid," thought the thief, "he will find only a pittance of money, and the rest will be safely hidden away." From then on, the rich man slept soundly. When it comes to one's Divine service, said R' Chaim Elazar of Munkatch, a person must act similarly. For if an individual serves his Creator visibly and publicly, he is likely to grow haughty or incur an "evil eye." The majority of a persons Divine service should therefore be performed privately, and only a minute amount should be revealed to the public.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The melamdim of the three highest classes in the Talmud Torah were talmidei chachamim of the highest level. Beginning in 5670 (1910) and continuing until the outbreak of World War I, the head of Mekor Chaim was none other than R. Elchonon Wasserman, Hy"d, who delivered the highest shiur. This was where he first earned fame for his ability to teach with tremendous depth and clarity. His brilliance would later become known to the entire Torah world. In the next two classes the maggidei shiur were R. Reuven Groman and R. Hirsch Elimelech (Meilech). Both, incidentally, were Kotzker Chassidim. After World War I, R. Yaakov Krinsky, a remarkable talmid chacham, became the Rosh Yeshivah. He was patient and especially careful in the way he expressed himself in shiur; the memory of his shiurim remained fresh in the minds of his talmidim for decades. He was a righteous and humble man. Once, he was asked how long he had been serving as rush yeshivah. He opened his eyes in puzzlement, "Rash yeshivah?! What do you mean? I've been sitting here for a few years..." It was clear from his expression that he simply could not begin to understand the question. Around 5687 (1927), R. Yaakov Krinsky lost his eyesight and was no longer able to give shiurim. He was replaced by R. Henich Wernick, zt"l, who

had until that time served as rav in a nearby town. There is an interesting story about his appointment: R. Henich's unique piety found expression in being unusually strict. His judgments regarding the members of his community were generally very machmir. However, since he knew that according to halachah, there was room to be lenient in many cases, he was accustomed to pay the litigants in such cases out of his own pocket for the loss his strict judgment had caused them. As a result, he went deeply into debt. In order to pay off his debts, he agreed to come to Brisk and serve as the head of the yeshivah ketanah"' At that time, R. Yaakov Krinsky's righteousness and humility became even more apparent as he continued to attend the shiurim at the yeshivah, listening to R. Henich give them, without uttering a word or interrupting him. Once, though, he did open his mouth. The topic of the shiur was a discussion of the opinion of the Pnei Yehoshua, and as much as they looked around the beis ha-midrash, the volume could not be found. R. Henich turned to R. Yaakov and asked him if perhaps he remembered the words of the Pnei Yehoshua on the sugyah they were learning. R. Yaakov, who, as we mentioned, had lost his eyesight, began to recite the Pnei Yehoshua on the subject word for word. "When did you last learn that passage?" asked R. Henich. R. Yaakov answered, casually, "Oh, not long ago, before the war..." That is, fifteen years previously!" R. Henich himself was a phenomenal gaon who succeeded in implanting in his talmidim the basics of understanding the sugyos of Shas. He is quoted often by R. Moshe Sokolovsky, rosh yeshivah of Toras Chesed, and author of Imrei Moshe, and likewise by R. Elchonon Wasserman in his Kovetz Shiurim. The Brisker Rav came to the yeshivah from time to time to test the knowledge of the talmidim. Once R. Boruch Ber Leibowitz came to Brisk, and The Brisker Rav brought--him and R. Michel Rasches to R. Henich's shiur to test the talmidim. A stormy halachic dispute erupted between these gedolim and the maggid shiur. While the argument raged, R. Yaakov sat to the side, leaning his head on the wall, as if he had nothing to contribute to the subject. He listened in silence. Only after the geonim had left the room did he turn to R. Henich and put forth his opinion on the subject that had been under debate moments before. R. Henich Wernick was murdered in the Holocaust along with the rest of the community of Brisk, Hy"d.

The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 196

❖ One couple asked Rav Scheinberg a question regarding their second son's bar mitzvah party. For their first child, they had made a lavish affair. Now, however, they had fallen on hard times, and they wanted to know if they should make the same kind of affair for their second son, even though they could no longer afford such extravagance. Rav Scheinberg answered them that they should borrow money and make a nice bar mitzvah party for the second one, just as they had done for the first. Otherwise, the second son may be jealous and develop an inferiority complex; he'll think that he's not as good as his brother.

Rav Scheinberg, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

C. TO BE SOFT SPOKEN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-35

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the reason for this mitzvah?
- Does this underlying principle extend toward other actions as well?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must accustom himself to speak gently, calmly, and pleasantly (be-nachas) with all people, as though standing in the direct presence of a king where one fears to raise his voice. For indeed, 'the whole earth is full of His glory' (Yeshayahu 6:3), and the Divine Presence (Shechinah) hovers over man at all times. For this reason,

Chazal likewise forbade walking with an erect and haughty posture (b'komas zekufah) or walking even four cubits bareheaded (gilui rosh), cultivating perpetual awe before the Almighty.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Frau Schenirer often quoted Tehillim 34: 13 - 14: Mi ha-ish heh-chafeitz chaim... - "Who is the man who is eager for life, who desires years of good fortune? He who guards his tongue from evil, his lips from deceitful speech." According to Frau Schenirer, it also meant not to talk harshly to our friends, to use only clean language, and to express love and care when speaking to people. "Girls, be careful not to embarrass your friends or your siblings. Remember, a word can bring joy and happiness to people; it can restore their confidence, their faith in God and man. And a word can kill; it can destroy a human being. "You can discern a person's character and personality in his voice. Ha-kol kol Yaakov — your voices should sound like that of our patriarch Yaakov." To prove her point, she told a story about Reb Avrohom of Lublin: "Reb Avrohom had a produce stand in the marketplace. He advertised his fruit and vegetables and loudly touted their fine qualities. 'They're fresh; they're tasty; they're juicy,' he intoned in a melodious voice. "Once a great rabbi passed by and heard Reb Avrohom lauding his produce. Something about Reb Avrohom's voice made him pause. Astonished, he cried, 'Ha-kol kol Yaakov, that's a voice of Yaakov, a voice of kedushah and taharah.' "Intrigued, the rabbi made further inquiries about this man. He followed him, observed his behavior, and monitored his actions. Eventually he discovered that this man was one of the thirty-six tzaddikim whose merit sustains the world. "Tayere kinderlach, dear children," Frau Schenirer continued, "this story teaches us how a person's voice expresses his personality and his character traits. This is why we must be careful with every word we say, lest it hurt or embarrass someone, God forbid. However, it's not enough to watch our words; we must also be careful with our tone of voice. We must pronounce our words softly, lovingly, and respectfully, because the mere tone of our voice can make or break a human being. "I expect my Bais Yaakov girls to behave this way."

Carry Me in Your Heart, By Pearl Benisch, p. 284

D. NOT TO WALK ARROGANTLY WITH YOUR HEAD HIGH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 50-12

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden for a person to walk even four cubits with an erect, haughty carriage (b'komas zekufah), as Scripture states: 'The whole earth is full of His glory' (Yeshayahu 6:3). Chazal explain (Kiddushin 31a) that one who walks with an arrogant, strutting gait acts as though he is crowding out the feet of the Divine Presence (Shechinah), displaying a brazen lack of reverence before the Creator.

E. NOT TO WALK ARROGANTLY WITH YOUR EYES HIGH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 22-2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The sin of arrogance (ga'avah), which is rooted primarily in the heart, is simultaneously expressed through and nurtured by the eyes. As King David proclaimed in the Name of Hashem: 'Whoever has haughty eyes and an expansive, arrogant heart — him I cannot endure' (Tehillim 101:5). Casting one's gaze upward in a posture of

aloof disdain betrays and fuels the conceit festering within the soul.

F. TO HUMBLY WALK WITH YOUR EYES LOWERED

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 36-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is the distinctive hallmark of truly humble individuals (anavim) to walk with their gaze cast downward toward the earth. By directing one's physical eyes toward the ground, a person reinforces internal modesty, curbs haughtiness, and preserves a continuous awareness of his humble origins and standing before the Creator.

G. TO BE HUMBLE AND FEEL THAT OTHERS ARE GREATER THAN YOU

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must cultivate genuine humility (shiflus ruach) before every human being, as taught in Pirkei Avos (4:10). In practice, this means training oneself to view every fellow person as inherently greater than oneself. If the other person is wiser or wealthier, one must honor him accordingly; if he is less learned, one should reason that the other's transgressions are committed unwittingly (b'shogeg), whereas one's own shortcomings are committed with full awareness (b'meizid). Bearing this perspective inspires a dignified shame and respectful awe in the presence of others.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTERS, VOL. 22, P. 23)

Being genuinely humble (anav) is regarded as equivalent to offering all the sacrifices upon the Altar. Humility instills the awareness that all of one's talents and blessings are free gifts from Hashem. It inspires a person to speak gently to all people, to endure slights without feeling the urge to retaliate, to seek the company of the humble just as Hashem chose the modest Har Sinai upon which to give the Torah, to avoid pursuing positions of power or prestige, and to dress simply without pretense.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once the fourteenth of Nisan fell on Shabbos, and they forgot whether the Pesach offering overrides Shabbos. They asked Hillel the Elder, who had come up from Babylonia, and he expounded through logical derivation and tradition from his teachers Shemayah and Avtalyon that the Pesach offering—which is fixed for its appointed time ('in its appointed season')—overrides Shabbos just like the daily Tamid offering. They immediately appointed him Nasi over them! And when the people forgot their knives before Shabbos, Hillel guided them to tuck the knives into the wool of their lambs or on the

horns of their kids. The Tosefta adds a second incident: Once King Agrippa wished to know the population of Israel at Pesach and asked the Kohanim to set aside one kidney from each Pesach offering; they counted 600,000 pairs of kidneys—double the number of those who left Egypt—and every single offering had at least ten people registered upon it!

Tosefta, Pesachim 4:11–12 (and Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 64b, 66a)

❖ Why did the Tanna of the first Mishnah of Pesachim open with the word Or ('On the light/evening of the fourteenth') rather than Leilei ('night')? Because he chose refined, uplifting language! And this accords with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: 'A person should never utter an unseemly or coarse word from his mouth, for behold, Scripture itself went out of its way to add eight extra letters rather than utter the single word "impure (tamei)," as it is written (Bereishis 7:8): "Of the clean animals, and of the animals that are not clean (asher einennah tehorah)"!' And this applies not only to words of Torah, and not only to rabbinic discourse, but even to ordinary everyday conversation, as it is written (Job 33:3): 'And my lips shall speak knowledge purely!' And in Shabbos (33a) the Sages warn that coarse speech (navlus peh) brings harsh decrees upon the world, for the human mouth was created for prayer, kindness, and Torah.

Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 3a & Shabbos 33a

❖ R' Yosef once became deathly ill. He miraculously recovered and his father asked him what he had seen in the upper world. R' Yosef responded, "I saw a topsy-turvy world. The uppermost ones were below and the lowest ones were on top." R' Yehoshua ben Levi responded, "My son, you saw the world clearly."

Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 50a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Each month, the yeshivah tackled a different area of self-improvement. One night, during the month they were working on acquiring the trait of fearlessness, Rav Yaakov Galinsky set out to conquer the biggest fear of all, the fear of death. The plan he came up with was simple. He'd go to the cemetery's purification room and immerse in the mikvah. People said that the souls of the dead immersed themselves in that very same mikvah. He'd come face-to-face with death itself. The experience would be so powerful that he'd be inspired to repent, and he'd never be afraid of death again. Once he'd made his decision, he wasted no time in putting it into action. That night he went to the purification room. It was pitch-black and deathly silent. He couldn't say he wasn't scared, but that's exactly the fear he wanted to break once and for all. He groped his way through the darkness searching for the table on which they placed the deceased—and found it! He climbed up and lay down on the cold marble slab, trembling with fear and working hard to control his thoughts and feelings. After all, what is death? he said to himself. It's only a transition between this world and the next. So what is there to be afraid of? This world is nothing more than a passageway. He got up from the table and made his way to the mikvah. He walked down the steps into the freezing cold water, his teeth chattering, and immersed himself. Would one of the dead men who were said to use the mikvah suddenly appear? No sooner had the thought popped into his mind when what he feared happened! He felt a hand grab his leg! One of the dead was in the mikvah! His body shook. The Angel of Death himself was right there in the mikvah with him! Fear wrapped its icy fingers around his heart. Another minute and the Angel of Death would grab him forever! Another second and he'd never return! Terror-stricken, he shot out of the mikvah and raced away. White-faced and panting for breath, he ran back to the yeshivah. "What happened?" his friends asked in alarm. "I went to the cheder taharah to tovel in the mikvah, to uproot from my heart the fear of death," he told them. "When I entered the mikvah, one of the dead rose up, so I fled." At the next meal, he noticed that one of his friends didn't look well. His face was a pasty white, and he seemed distracted. "What happened?" Yaakov asked his friend. "You'll never believe it," the bachur said. "I decided to break my fear of death by going to the cheder taharah and immersing myself in the mikvah!" "And so?" Yaakov asked, knowing the answer all too well. "The unimaginable happened! As I was in the mikvah, I touched a dead body!" He

shuddered. “Another minute and the Angel of Death would have grabbed me forever!” “I thought I went for a lesson on how to confront my fears of death,” R’ Yaakov would say in later years when recounting the story. “But I actually got a lesson in humility. Why was I so sure I was the only bachur in the yeshivah who would think of that idea?”

From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, By Rebetzin G. Lehrer

H. NOT TO THINK THAT YOU ARE A TZADIK

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-25

As it says "Do not say in your heart it is because of my righteousness" (Devarim 9:4 Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must never view himself as completely righteous in his own eyes, as Scripture cautions: 'Do not say in your heart... "Because of my righteousness Hashem has brought me to possess this land"' (Devarim 9:4, Parshas Eikev). Self-righteous complacency blinds a person to his spiritual deficiencies and fosters spiritual arrogance. Even if the entire world proclaims a person to be a tzaddik, our Sages instruct (Niddah 30b) that he should remain acutely conscious of his unfulfilled spiritual obligations before Hashem.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) would often wonder, "Why do people come to me with so many questions?" Surely, he reasoned, they just find it calming to talk to an old man. It was his duty, therefore, to act kindly to Jews who were broken in spirit and crushed by the weight of their troubles. Thus he continued to listen considerately and, since there was no alternative, he gave berachos to those who sought him out."

The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, p. 188

I. NOT TO THINK THAT YOU ARE A CHACHAM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must never consider himself fully wise in his own estimation, as King Shlomo warns: 'Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear Hashem and turn away from evil' (Mishlei 3:7). Presuming that one possesses self-sufficient wisdom closes the mind to further instruction, breeds intellectual vanity, and undermines true reverence of Heaven (yiras Shamayim).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ "Though Rav Elchonon Wasserman was a gadol, he never viewed himself as such. In fact, at one of the Keneisios Gedolos, the gedolim were holding a private meeting after one of the sessions. The chairman asked all the participants at the session to leave the room, so that the gedolim could meet in privacy, and hundreds of people filed out, among them Reb

Elchonon. He saw himself as a 'simple melamed.' They had to search for him and insist that he return to the meeting!"

Warmed By Their Fire, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

J. IF YOU KNOW A LOT OF WISDOM DO NOT HOLD YOURSELF IN HIGH ESTEEM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-12

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught (Pirkei Avos 2:8): 'If you have acquired much Torah knowledge, do not claim special credit for yourself, for it was precisely for this purpose that you were created.' A scholar must realize that his intellectual capacities and opportunities are divine gifts entrusted to him to fulfill his essential mission in life, not laurels for personal self-aggrandizement.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ A person should always be pleasant upon entering and pleasant upon leaving, minimize business, and toil in Torah. It once happened that Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar was returning from his teacher's house in Migdal Eder, riding leisurely on a donkey along the seashore, feeling proud of his vast Torah learning. He encountered a man who was extraordinarily ugly. When the man greeted him, Rabbi Shimon did not return the greeting, but instead said to him: 'Empty one! How ugly are the children of Avraham our father—are all the people of your town as ugly as you?' The man replied to him: 'What can I do? Go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: How ugly is this vessel that You have made!' Immediately realizing that he had sinned, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar dismounted from his donkey, prostrated himself before the man, and pleaded, 'I submit to you—forgive me!' The man answered, 'I will not forgive you until you go to the Craftsman Who made me and tell Him how ugly is this vessel that You made!' Rabbi Shimon walked behind him for half a mil until the people of his town heard of his arrival and came out to greet him, calling out, 'Peace be upon you, our Master!' The man asked them, 'Whom are you calling Rabbi?' They pointed to the scholar walking behind him. The man declared, 'If this is a Rabbi, may there not be many like him in Israel!' Shocked, they asked, 'Heaven forbid! What did he do to you?' He recounted the entire incident. The townspeople pressed the man urgently to forgive Rabbi Shimon, and he finally said, 'Behold, I forgive him, provided that he does not make a habit of acting this way!' That very day, Rabbi Shimon sat and expounded in his great study hall: 'A person should always be soft like a reed and never hard like a cedar! When the four winds of the world blow, the reed bends back and forth with them, and when the winds subside, the reed stands upright in its place—and what is its ultimate reward? It merits to have a quill taken from it to write a Sefer Torah! The cedar, however, stands rigid until a storm wind uproots it and overturns it on its face, and people chop it up for beams and throw the rest into the fire. Therefore the Sages said: Always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar!'

Derech Eretz Rabbah 4:1 (cf. Talmud Bavli, Taanis 20a-b)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld would take great pains to hide his true greatness. Sometimes, at gatherings of great talmidei chachamim, R' Chaim would quote from memory large passages from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds or even from the Rishonim. But he would always attempt a disclaimer, saying, "I just happened to come across this yesterday," or something similar.

Guardian of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 114

K. TO THINK THAT YOU ARE STILL ON A LOW LEVEL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-7

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred duty drawn from Scripture for a person to remain humble and lowly in his own estimation while according profound honor to those who revere Hashem, as it says: 'In whose eyes he is lowly and despised, yet he honors those who fear Hashem' (Tehillim 15:4). A person should always view his own spiritual standing with deep modesty; conversely, when encountering another who is God-fearing, he must regard that individual as worthy of great dignity and bow his head before him in genuine respect.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once the last prophets—Chaggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—passed away, prophecy ceased from Israel, yet Heaven still communicated through a Heavenly Voice (Bat Kol). An incident occurred when the Sages gathered in the upper chamber of the house of Guria in Jericho, and a Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed to them: 'There is one man here among you who is worthy of the Divine Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh), except that his generation is not worthy of it!' All the Sages turned their eyes upon Hillel the Elder; and when he passed away, they eulogized him: 'Alas, the humble one! Alas, the pious one, the disciple of Ezra!' And another incident occurred when the Sages were sitting in Yavneh and heard a Heavenly Voice proclaim: 'There is one man here worthy of the Divine Spirit!'—and all the Sages turned their eyes upon Shmuel HaKatan.

Tosefta, Sotah 13:4-5 (and Talmud Bavli, Sotah 48b)

L. NOT TO COUNT HOW MANY JEWS THERE ARE

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-30

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden to count Jews directly, even for the purpose of a mitzvah. For this reason, when the kohanim in the Beis HaMikdash conducted a lottery (payis) to determine who would perform the sacred service, they were never counted by their heads; rather, each kohen extended a finger, and the supervisor counted the extended fingers (Yoma 22a–b). One who counts the Jewish people directly by head violates two negative prohibitions, as Scripture states: 'Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured nor counted' (Hoshea 2:1). King David was incited to conduct a direct census of the nation, which brought about a devastating plague upon Klal Yisroel (Shmuel II 24:1–15).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

MOSES MONTEFIORE

"The danger of counting Jews is that if they believed, even for a moment, that there is strength in numbers, the Jewish people would long ago have given way to despair. To win the Jewish battle – the battle of the spirit, the victory of heart, mind and soul – you do not need numbers. You need dedication, commitment, study, prayer,

> vision, courage, ideals, hope"

> **RABBEINU MENACHEM RECANATI**
>
> Blessing is only found when something is hidden and not counted. That is because when something is modestly hidden Hashem can miraculously increase something but it will not be an open miracle. But once it is counted then because Hashem does want to make open miracles it is more difficult to have berachah, blessing.

SERVING HASHEM IN THE HEART: PERFECTION & ZEAL

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to developing attitudes and perspectives that helps us to perform mitzvos and avoid aveiros, which in turn help us to perfect our character and come closer to Hashem.

18. Not to Contemplate Transgressions

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-29

As it says "Do not follow after your hearts" (Bamidbar 15:39 Parshas Shelach)

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

Scripture warns: 'And do not follow after your own hearts and after your own eyes' (Bamidbar 15:39, Parshas Shelach). Through this negative commandment, we are cautioned against harboring thoughts of sin (hirhur aveirah) or meditating upon forbidden desires, as well as contemplating the heretical arguments of those who rebel against Hashem — such as the foreign rulers who seek to lead the people astray — lest one stumble and be drawn after them. Since the Almighty examines the innermost thoughts and desires of the heart, how could a person brazenly defile his mind and soul before Him?

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. The more we think of doing good things the more we will strive towards that. The reveres is certainly true as well, that the more we think of doing negative things, the less likely we will be to strive towards perfecting our character.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi) emerged from the bathhouse, wrapped himself in his garments, and sat to attend to the needs of the community. His servant poured a cup of wine for him, but because Rebbi was immersed in the needs of the people, he did not turn to take it from him. The servant became drowsy and fell asleep. Rebbi turned, looked upon him, and said: 'Well did Shlomo say: "Sweet is the sleep of the laborer, whether he eats little or much, while the satiety of the rich will not allow him to sleep" (Koheles 5:11). Take someone like us: because we occupy ourselves with the needs of the public, we are not even permitted to sleep!'

Koheles Rabbah 5:11:1

19. To Be Meticulous for Minor as for Major Commandments

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-21

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

A person must be as meticulous in observing an apparently minor commandment (mitzvah kalah) as he is with the most stringent one (mitzvah chamurah), for one does not know the true reward assigned to each mitzvah (Pirkei Avos 2:1). Furthermore, one must constantly weigh the temporary material cost of fulfilling a mitzvah against its eternal reward, and contrast the fleeting pleasure of a transgression against its devastating and enduring loss.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. Because we want to perfect ourselves as much as possible, we should be meticulous for every mitzvah, both large and small.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 1)

If one owns a watch composed of a thousand delicate pieces, discarding even a few small gears will cause the watch to lose its entire function and perfection (sheleimus). The same principle applies to mitzvos: we need every single detail and nuance of the mitzvah. We likewise need every part and every day of our lives to be used properly; otherwise, our life will lack its intended sheleimus. In the same way that a diamond merchant weighs and inspects every gem with meticulous care, so must we approach every detail of the mitzvos.

SFAS EMES

• Rashi: the light mitzvos that a man tramples with his heel. The Sfas Emes hears in this a different kind of lightness: these are the mitzvos a person tramples because at first he does not understand how there could be a mitzvah in this at all—but in truth the whole world and its fullness is full of mitzvos, for everything was created for His glory. The "light" mitzvah is not a lesser command; it is a command not yet seen. Meticulousness is vision: the meticulous one is not the one who guards more rules, but the one whose world keeps filling with mitzvos — the mundane turning, deed by deed, into the commanded. The heel, the lowest and most trampled place, becomes the measure of how far the light has reached (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5656).

• The midrash pictures a menorah made of links — and Rashi, from Tanchuma, reads “when the sins that I trod under my heels surround me” (avon akevai yesubeini) and “in guarding them there is great reward” (be-shomram eikev rav) as the light mitzvah a man tramples with his heel. The Sfas Emes teaches that the world was made to be joined. Every thing carries an inner point of His light — and Israel's work is to draw that radiance even into the lowly and the habitual. Commandment (mitzvah) is joining. And the menorah of links: the one who brings thing

to thing until the vessel is complete is called a builder. The Gemara's question is thus answered: yirah is "light" only in the sense that it is near to man — the nearest rung is the lightest to climb, yet it is the foundation of all the rest. So the small mitzvah is not the margin of avodah — it is the joint that holds the whole structure together, and meticulousness is structural, not decorative (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5631).

• Examining the word eikev ("heel") and the structure of the human body from the head down to the heel, the Sfas Emes teaches that the 613 mitzvos form a single spiritual stature corresponding to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews. Just as the entire body stands upon the heels, the preservation of the loftiest spiritual perceptions depends upon meticulous care in the simplest, most humble mitzvos at the heel of action (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5643).

• Rashi on the light mitzvos a man tramples — and the Tanchuma on the words "in guarding them there is great reward" (be-shomram eikev rav), raise the difficulty together: if the Torah states no reward for the light ones, why does the verse promise "great reward at the heel" (eikev rav), precisely there, in the keeping of the trampled ones? The Sfas Emes gives the reason in one line: the light mitzvos a person does not do for the reward, but only to do the will of the Blessed Hashem. No wage is advertised, so no wage-seeker arrives; what remains when the marketplace empties is pure will. The trampled mitzvah is thus the one place where the deed can be only His. The meticulousness of the mishnah is thus the purest laboratory of acting for the sake of Heaven (le-shem Shamayim): the small mitzvah, done with no audience and no advertised wage, is the deed most transparently His — and its reward is hidden precisely because it was never sought. The hidden wage is the signature of the hidden deed (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5633).

• In Parshas Ki Seitzei, the Sfas Emes offers comforting counsel for a person who feels he cannot fix everything at once: gather the small points of goodness within you and guard them purely—designating "a place outside the camp" where the good remains unmixed with evil. The yetzer's whole counsel, the Sfas Emes says, is multiplicity — piling up the "light" sins until they are many. The tikkun answers in the same coin: a multiplicity of the good, gathered one small deed at a time. The mishnah's meticulousness is thus cherishing: the small kept purely, guarded from mixture, gathered and held dear, has the power of the whole — the little becomes the tree of life, and from that one guarded point the whole camp is kept. Be meticulous with the little, and the little will be meticulous with you (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Seitzei 5634).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ An incident occurred when they brought a cooked dish to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai to taste, and two dates and a bucket of water to Rabban Gamliel, and both of them said: 'Bring them up to the Sukkah!'—applying a personal stringency not to taste even a snack outside the Sukkah. Yet when they gave Rabbi Tzadok a piece of food smaller than the volume of an olive (k'zayis), he held it in a napkin without washing his hands, ate it outside the Sukkah, and did not recite the full Grace After Meals after it—so as not to recite an unwarranted blessing!

Mishnah, Sukkah 2:5

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ I would like to share a story I heard from Rav Shaul Engelsberg at a Chanukah mesibah this week. In 2008, the Mercaz HaRav massacre took place. One of the students who was killed al Kiddush Hashem, for the sanctification of Hashem's Name, was named Doron Mahareta. This is his story. Doron was Ethiopian. He came to Eretz Yisrael as a child, walking hundreds of kilometers to reach the Land of Israel. During that journey, two of his brothers tragically lost their lives. To

Doron, Mercaz HaRav was the greatest yeshivah in the world. He went to the yeshivah and applied to join, but the Rosh Yeshivah told him gently, "I am very sorry, but you are not quite a fit." Mercaz HaRav was an advanced institution, and at that time Doron did not yet have the skills needed to learn Gemara at that level. Doron was not discouraged. While he was there for the entrance exam, he noticed a sign saying the yeshivah needed a dishwasher. He applied for the job and was hired. That was his love for Torah. Undeterred, he took a job as a dishwasher, much like Hillel, who was once unable to enter the Beis HaMidrash and found another way just to gain a piece of Torah. The Rosh Yeshivah knew nothing about this arrangement. Doron worked every day, and as soon as he finished washing the dishes, he sat down to learn with the students. He learned with extraordinary diligence and became known as a true masmid. After seven or eight months, Doron approached the Rosh Yeshivah and said, "Could I please speak with you in learning?" The Rosh Yeshivah responded kindly, "But I already told you that you are not the right fit." Doron persisted and began discussing Torah. By the end of the conversation, the Rosh Yeshivah accepted him as a full-fledged member of the yeshivah. That was the depth of his devotion and love for Torah. In a short time, Doron made a siyum on all Shulchan Aruch together with the Nosei Keilim. He was learning in the yeshivah library when he was murdered, at age 26, giving his life al Kiddush Hashem.

Table Talk, Edition 472, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

20. To Strive to Perform Mitzvos with Utmost Perfection

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. The following conditions help us to do a mitzvah in the most perfect way possible, and so refine ourselves the most through the mitzvah.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ "Speak to the Children of Israel" (Vayikra 1:2). Rabbi Yudan said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani: To what may this be compared? To a King who owned chests full of royal robes, cloaks, and linen undergarments (apikarsin), yet every single day he kept giving his personal valet detailed instructions about one particular fine linen tunic — telling him: "Shake the dust out of it, fold it carefully, and keep constant watch over it!" Finally, his valet asked him: "My lord the King, out of all the robes and tunics that you own in your wardrobe, why do you give me so many instructions only about this one linen tunic?" The King answered him: "Because all my other robes are worn on the outside, whereas this linen tunic is the one that touches and cleaves directly to my body!" So too, Moshe asked before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the Universe! Out of all the seventy sovereign nations that You have in Your world, why do You give me so many detailed commandments only concerning Israel — 'Command the Children of Israel,' 'Speak to the Children of Israel,' 'Say to the Children of Israel'?" Hashem answered him: "Because they are the nation that cleaves closest to Me! As it is written: 'For just as a linen sash cleaves to the waist of a man, so have I caused the whole House of Israel to cleave to Me, says Hashem' (Yirmiyahu 13:11)."

Vayikra Rabbah 2:4 & Yalkut Shimoni on Jeremiah 315:3

A. TO HAVE IN MIND THAT YOU ARE DOING A MITZVAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

A person must perform every single commandment with the explicit conscious intent (kavanah) to fulfill his sacred obligation before Hashem. As the poskim rule in accordance with the Talmudic principle (Rosh Hashanah 28b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 60:4): 'Mitzvos require intent' (mitzvos tzrichos kavanah). Performing a commandment without mindfulness deprives the physical action of its animating spiritual soul.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 11)

While mechanical habit is dangerous when it turns mitzvos into mindless routine, the power of habit can be harnessed for profound holiness. By training oneself in meticulous halachic habits, precision and cleanliness of character (nekiyus) become a natural, second nature.

SFAS EMES

• At the Splitting of the Sea, when the Jewish people beheld the revelation of Hashem's majesty and sang, "This is my God and I will glorify Him" (Zeh E-li ve'anveihu), our classic commentators offer two seemingly distinct interpretations of the word ve'anveihu. In his discourse on Pesach (5646), the Sfas Emes answers with a foundational insight: "Both explanations are truly one". Prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the Torah makes no mention of constructing a physical Tabernacle, because the Jewish people stood at the spiritual level of ministering angels (malachei ha-shareis) and required no external building to house the Divine Presence. When we pause for even a quiet moment before a mitzvah with the conscious intention of "ani ve-Hu"—inviting Hashem to rest within our mind, heart, and limbs through the fulfillment of His word—we fashion our own person into a living Mishkan where the Shechinah dwells directly (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5646).

• Why do our Sages attach such importance to conscious intention (kavanah) when performing a mitzvah? After all, Hashem's sovereignty over creation is absolute whether human beings focus their minds upon it or not. In Parshas Beshalach (5648), the Sfas Emes illuminates this question through a remarkable Midrash on the verse in Tehillim (93:2), "Your throne is established from of old" (nachon kis'acha me'az): Rabbi Berechyah said in the name of Rabbi Abahu, "Although You have existed from eternity, Your royal throne was not firmly seated until Your children sang Az Yashir at the Sea." Mindful kavanah is our personal Az Yashir: by consciously directing both inclinations of our heart ("b'chol levavecha") to attribute our action and vitality back to Hashem, we elevate the physical deed to its Source and establish His throne of glory within our everyday lives (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Beshalach 5648).

• In Parshas Beshalach (5650–5651), the Sfas Emes examines Moshe Rabbeinu's instruction to the Jewish people regarding the man on Shabbos: "Eat it today, for today is Shabbos unto Hashem" (ichluhu ha-yom ki Shabbos ha-yom la-Hashem). He explains that Moshe was imparting the inner secret of kavanah: even when an outward physical action looks identical to yesterday's routine, on Shabbos the eating itself must be performed with explicit mindfulness for the sake of Heaven (le-shem Shabbos, le-shmo Yisbarach). Every Torah commandment, the Sfas Emes explains in his companion discourse of 5650, consists of an outward physical frame (guf) and an inward spiritual form (tzuras ha-neshamah), for the two hundred and forty-eight positive mitzvos and three hundred and sixty-five prohibitions form the spiritual anatomy of the divine soul. When a Jew pauses before

fulfilling a mitzvah to humble the distractions of the body and awaken the inner power of the soul (koach ha-neshamah), his conscious kavanah infuses living spirit into the body of the deed and draws all three dimensions—the physical place in which he stands, the moment in time, and his own vital soul—into direct attachment with their supernal root (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Beshalach 5650).

• At the opening of Parshas Terumah, the Midrash Rabbah contrasts ordinary human commerce with the gift of the Torah and its commandments. In earthly trade, if a merchant sells silver, he does not sell gold; and even when a mortal king parts with a precious treasure from his palace, he walks away from the buyer once the transaction is complete. Regarding the Torah and mitzvos, however, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: "I have given you a goodly acquisition (lekach tov nasati lachem)—I have sold you My Torah, and the Seller is sold along with His merchandise" (ha-mocheir nimkar imo). When, however, a Jew approaches the mitzvah with clear awareness (da'as) that "in every matter and deed he performs there is a vital force from Hashem", and through that mindfulness nullifies his own private will before the Divine power residing within that act, the veil of nature opens: he merits the direct revelation of Hashem's living Presence inside the mitzvah itself, acquiring the King together with His command (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5631).

• A thoughtful person can easily feel daunted when contemplating the lofty demand of Kavanas HaMitzvos: "Who am I—a finite human being of flesh and blood, pulled in ten directions by daily responsibilities and distractions—to imagine that my concentration during a blessing or a mitzvah can build a sanctuary for the Infinite Creator or bring glory to the King of kings?" The Sfas Emes answers with one of the most encouraging principles in all of Chassidic thought: according to the natural laws of creation, it is indeed impossible. Yet precisely because the Jewish people burned with such an overwhelming yearning (teshukah) that there be some way for them to honor and house their Creator even beyond the bounds of natural possibility, Hashem fulfilled their desire and declared, "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I glory" (Yisrael asher becha espo'ar). Even when our concentration feels imperfect, the sincere longing of the heart to perform a mitzvah for Hashem's sake opens heavenly gates that our natural faculties could never unlock on their own (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5647).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Dovid liked to wear colored shirts. To his mind, just because a shirt has a color, that does not make him less of a servant of Hashem. But his brother, Yitzchak, would constantly badger him to change to a white shirt, telling him that it wasn't fitting for him to wear colored shirts. Dovid, who had a relationship with the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon, decided to ask his opinion. After hearing the question, Rav Mattisyahu asked, "So why do you wear colored shirts?" "Well," Dovid replied, "I want my children to see that even a person who wears a colored shirt can be a good Yid." "Nonsense!" Rav Mattisyahu countered. "That is not the real reason... "Look," Rav Mattisyahu went on, "I don't know how Moshe Rabbeinu dressed. Perhaps he wore colored clothing, and perhaps not. Indeed, clothing does not define what kind of oveid Hashem you are. In fact, I tell menahalim that they should not decide who to accept in their chadarim or yeshivos based on the color of the shirt worn by the father. That being said, why are you doing something that might make your children ashamed?" Dovid sat there, digesting the Mashgiach's words, when the Mashgiach's voice rang out again. "Still, I forbid you from changing the color of your shirts for one year! I don't want you to put on a white shirt only because the Mashgiach 'twisted your arm.' In a year from now, if you feel that you want to change to a white shirt, you can change..."

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

B. TO HAVE REVERENCE WHILE DOING THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should perform every commandment with profound reverence (yirah) and awe before the Divine Majesty, intertwined with great love. As taught by Rabbi R' Shimon bar Yochai in the Zohar (Tikkunei Zohar 10), any commandment executed without awe and love lacks spiritual vitality and cannot ascend on high before the Almighty.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says: Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will endure; anyone whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure. Anyone whose good deeds precede his wisdom, his wisdom will endure; anyone whose wisdom precedes his good deeds, his wisdom will not endure. To what may this matter be compared? To someone who walked into a shopkeeper's store and said to him: "Give me a quarter-log of wine!" The shopkeeper said to him: "Hand me a solid jar to hold it!" — and instead of a clay jar, the customer held open his porous leather pouch. Then the customer said to him: "And give me olive oil!" The shopkeeper said to him: "Hand me a jar to hold it!" — and the customer held out the woven corner of his woolen cloak. The shopkeeper looked at him and said: "Unfortunate man! You do not have a single vessel in your hand that can hold liquid without leaking everything onto the ground, and yet you ask to buy wine and oil?!" So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, says to the wicked: "You have no good deeds or fear of Heaven in your hands to serve as a vessel, and yet you seek to study My Torah?!" As it is said: "And to the wicked, God says: What business have you reciting My statutes?" (Tehillim 50:16) — "You do not keep My statutes; how then can you recite them while you hate moral instruction (mussar)?" (Tehillim 50:16–17).

Avos DeRabbi Nasan, Recension B, Chapter 32:8 (cf. CHZ-ALL-3571)

C. TO HAVE LOVE FOR HASHEM WHILE DOING THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must infuse the performance of every mitzvah with passionate love for Hashem (ahavas Hashem). As Rabbi R' Shimon bar Yochai revealed in the Zohar, a commandment performed without love and reverence lacks spiritual wings and cannot soar aloft to Heaven. Loving devotion transforms cold obligation into an intimate, vibrant connection with the Creator.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Nechama Vallis once returned from a trip to the United States and brought Rebbetzin Rochel Auerbach (the wife of Rav Shmuel Auerbach) a gift of a tape recorder and some very interesting cassette tapes. When Rebbetzin Rochel asked why she chose this gift, Nechama explained, "I know you spend so many hours in your room, waiting up until late so you

can tell your husband it's time to go to sleep. Now you can listen to Torah tapes while you wait." Rebbetzin Rochel answered with the greatest sincerity, "Thank you very much, Nechama, but I really won't use it. If I can hear Reb Shmuel's voice as he learns, what tape can compare to that?"

From Reb Shmuel, Written By R' Eytan Kobre, Published by Judaica Press

D. TO HAVE JOY THAT YOU ARE PRIVILEGED TO SERVE HASHEM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

As is written "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and with a good heart from an abundance of all" (Devarim 28:47, Parshas Ki Savo)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should experience boundless joy (simchah shel mitzvah) when performing any commandment, recognizing that each mitzvah he encounters is an extraordinary treasure bestowed upon him by the Holy One, blessed be He. The greater one's joy, the greater his heavenly reward. The saintly Kabbalist, the holy Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi), revealed that all the spiritual heights he attained — whereby the gates of supreme wisdom and the holy spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) were unlocked for him — were granted solely as a reward for the immense, uncontainable joy with which he observed every single mitzvah. The Arizal explained that this is the deeper meaning of the rebuke: Because you did not serve Hashem your God with joy and with a good heart, from an abundance of all' (Devarim 28:47). One is expected to cherish the performance of a mitzvah with far greater delight than any worldly treasure, prizing it above mountains of gold, jewels, and pearls.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 7)

Zrizus is both an expression of joy and a primary cause of joy. Under the principle of "chitzoniyus me'oreret hapnimiyus" (external actions awaken inner emotions), enthusiastic physical movement arouses inner spiritual fervor. When we carry out mitzvos with visible passion and alacrity, that external energy transforms our internal state and instills deep simchah. Mitzvos performed with zeal and delight are profoundly cherished by the Almighty.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One Erev Rosh Hashanah, a member of the Ofakim community, celebrated a siyum masechta in the shul. However, he forgot to bring any food to honor the occasion. Rav Shimshon Pincus quickly ran home and returned with cakes and drinks, but even that wasn't enough. As soon as the man completed his siyum, Rav Shimshon grabbed him by the hands and pulled him into a spirited dance along with the other people who were present. Another participant approached Rav Pincus and whispered awkwardly, "HaRav, it's a very serious day, should we really be dancing on Erev Rosh Hashanah?" Rav Shimshon replied confidently, "What, do you think that in Shomayim they're not dancing right now to celebrate our siyum?!" He continued singing and twirling joyfully in honor of Torah.

From The Life of Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, Published by Feldheim

❖ Rabbi Shlomo Porter was the heartbeat of the Baltimore Jewish community, a man defined by his warmth, his depth, and a quality best described as geshmak. As the Founder of Etz Chaim, he was not merely an outreach professional but a father, friend, teacher, and mentor to thousands. It was said that to know him was to know twenty people wrapped in one; he was a "unity of many things," much like the songs he loved to sing. Rabbi Porter's worldview was forged by the extraordinary resilience of his parents. His parents were partisans who fought against the Nazis, and his mother was the sole survivor of her family. Despite the horrors she witnessed, her enduring message to her son was, "Zei freilach Yidden" (Be happy Yidden). She also instilled in him an uncompromising reverence for Shabbos, telling him that when they came to America, it would have been better to be killed by the Nazis than to be mechalel Shabbos (desecrate the Shabbos). This intensity of connection to Shabbos became Rabbi Porter's hallmark and fittingly, his neshamah (soul) left this world on Shabbos. While he was famous for outreach (kiruv), his impact was rooted in deep scholarship. Very few in the field possessed his high madreigah (level) of learning. The Brisker Rav once noted that if a teacher of the aleph-beis is also an expert in the entirety of the Talmud, his teaching of the aleph-beis is on a completely different plane. This was Rabbi Porter. Because he was an expert scholar, his teaching of even the basics contained profound depth. While he led the organization Etz Chaim, the true "Tree of Life" was the Porter home and his Shabbos table. Many organizations spun off from Etz Chaim, including Achim, and this TableTalk, but in reality, they all spun from the "Porter heart." He possessed a magnetic authenticity. Speaking with him for just a few minutes felt like standing under a "waterfall of spirit." Yet he operated with a profound menuchas hanefesh (calmness of soul). Rabbi Shlomo Porter was once driving with his son-in-law. They were in a blue car that had a habit of stalling. One day the car stalled again, and Rabbi Porter, without missing a beat, calmly opened the driver's door, put his foot on the ground, and pushed the car forward until the engine caught. That was how Rav Porter handled many "stalls" in life, with menuchas hanefesh and steady calm. He showed how much a person can accomplish with the strength that comes from menuchas hanefesh. The world feels colder now without his warmth. However, his legacy is vast, predicted to be clearly visible even five generations from now. He left behind a community transformed by his laughter, his learning, and his unshakeable belief that being a Jew is, above all, geshmak.

Table Talk, Edition 468 (Parshas Toldos), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ A close talmid once observed Rav Shlomo Freifeld putting on his tefillin. He noticed that he held the tefillin in his hands for a while, his eyes closed, seemingly lost in thought. Only after a lengthy period of reflection did Reb Shlomo proceed. Later, the talmid asked his Rabbi why he had delayed putting on his tefillin. Reb Shlomo related the story of the Gemara in Brachos, in which one Amora asked another one why he was smiling. "Anna tefilin kamanicha", I am putting on tefillin was the reply. Explained Reb Shlomo, "The act of putting on tefillin should fill the heart with joy. Today, I didn't feel it, so I paused to reflect upon what was preventing me from feeling happy, and only once I felt the simchah shel mitzvah did I continue."

Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press

❖ The Imrei Emes once said: Imagine that someone were to offer you a million dollars to abstain from wearing tefillin; you would surely turn down the offer. If so, you should perform the mitzvah with as much joy as if you had received the million dollars. This is the type of creative spiritual accounting that our Sages recommended.

The Pirkei Avos Treasury, By Rabbi Moshe Lieber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

E. TO FINISH THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

As it says, 'the entire mitzvah you should guard to do" (Devarim 8:1, Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must strive to complete every mitzvah in its entirety rather than leaving it half-done. Regarding the verse, 'Every commandment (kol ha-mitzvah) that I command you this day you shall observe to do' (Devarim 8:1, Parshas Eikev), Rashi explains in the name of the Midrash (Tanchuma, Eikev 6) that if one begins a mitzvah, he is instructed to finish it, for a mitzvah is credited only to the one who brings it to completion. King Hoshea ben Elah performed a significant deed by removing the armed border guards that Yerovam had stationed to block pilgrims from ascending to the Beis HaMikdash, announcing that anyone who wished could ascend; yet because he failed to actively command and lead them to do so, he was exiled and the ten tribes were exiled with him (Gittin 88a). Our Sages taught that one who begins a mitzvah and abandons it when he has the power to complete it is demoted from his stature; indeed, because Yehudah initiated the rescue of Yosef but did not bring him safely back to his father, he was deposed from leadership and subsequently buried his wife and two sons (Sotah 13b; Bereishis Rabbah 85:3). Nevertheless, if circumstances prevent one from finishing, he must not refrain from doing whatever is within his capability. We see this from Moshe Rabbeinu, who separated three cities of refuge on the eastern bank of the Jordan even though they could not function until the western cities were designated decades later, as it says: 'Then Moshe set apart three cities' (Devarim 4:41).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In 2019 when Reb Daniel and Michal Balsam received the devastating news that Reb Daniel was diagnosed with ALS they recognized the need to plan for the subsequent years. When Reb Daniel discussed his condition with his family members it was in the context of how grateful he was for the Kindness of Hashem. "Everyone dies, nobody lives forever. Some people pass away suddenly and some over prolonged time. How fortunate I am to have been given time to prepare my final years to achieve those goals which I always wanted to do. I am able to retire early and begin doing those things which are important to me." In fact, the amount of learning and classes he gave was truly remarkable. Perhaps the biggest lesson he taught was to fully accept Hashem's judgment with the greatest joy. With no element of exaggeration, he was always joyful until his final moment. Earlier, in the summer of 2017, Rav Hershel Schachter delivered a shiur on the mitzvah of t'cheiles in Baltimore. Reb Daniel who attended the shiur became interested in the inyan and decided that one day he would like to perform that mitzvah. As time moved forward and Reb Daniel got sick and his condition worsened he realized that he did not have much time left in this world. He buckled down with great diligence to study the sugyah in great depths and in his final year he finally fulfilled that lifelong dream. How great every mitzvah was to him!

Table Talk, Edition 350 (Parshas Shoftim), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

F. TO FULFILL ALL ITS MINUTIAE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must exercise scrupulous care when fulfilling a mitzvah, executing it with exactitude according to all its prescribed halachic details and fine nuances (dikdukei mitzvos). Just as a delicate instrument ceases to function if a single cog is misplaced, the spiritual integrity and metaphysical resonance of a divine commandment depend upon the faithful observance of every detail commanded by Hashem.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The son of the Chofetz Chaim was once sitting with a group of Hassidim, and the talk turned to the miracles that their respective Admorim had performed. One Chassid told a fantastic tale about his rebbe, a second tried to top that with a miracle story regarding his own rebbe, and so on. At one point, one of the Hassidim turned to the son of the Chofetz Chaim and said, "Your father is known for his tzidkut. What miracles has he performed?" "Many people like to tout the miracles their spiritual leaders have wrought, " the son of the Chofetz Chaim replied, "in the spirit of the Sages' teaching, 'Tzaddik gozer veHaKadosh Baruch Hu mekayem — a righteous person decrees, and God fulfills.' "My father does the opposite: HaKadosh Baruch Hu gozeir, vehatzaddik mekayem. My father fulfills all of Hashem's decrees. "

Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Roni a soldier was off for the weekend. He was looking to hitch a ride home to be'er sheva. A man named Avraham Garfunkel offered him a ride. He was going to Netania instead but offered to have him for Shabbos. Roni surprisingly agreed. He had an inspiring Shabbos. He wanted to know what he can do to concretize the inspiring Shabbos. They decided to take a random halachah from Kitzur. It opened to " put right shoe on first, then left shoe". He agreed to do that. It was not easy and people teased him, but he kept it. Two months later Israel was in the Lebanon war. A jeep beeped to call him to the battlefield. He put on shoes on the wrong foot, and used a few extras seconds to replace them and do it right. He consequently missed his jeep, and took the next one. All of the people in the first jeep were killed by a mine and he was saved by this small halachah.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 131

G. TO RUN TO FULFILL IT

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should enthusiastically run to greet and fulfill a mitzvah, demonstrating an eager thirst to perform the Creator's will. As King David declared: 'I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You broaden my heart' (Tehillim 119:32). Our Sages likewise taught (Pirkei Avos 4:2): 'Run to pursue even an apparently minor mitzvah.'

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A police officer once stopped Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Mountaindale Yeshivah, on Mountaindale's Woodridge Road. "Officer," Rav Shlomo began, "I've driven down this road thousands of times. Have you ever pulled me over to compliment my driving instead of giving me a ticket? You see, I'm a teacher, and I know that I can't merely rebuke my students. I must also encourage and compliment them!" Rav Shlomo's sincere words made an impression, and the officer waived the ticket, allowing Rav Shlomo to continue on his way. Similarly, a student recalled, "Rav Shlomo taught me something remarkable: 'Do you know the difference between a college professor and a rebbi? One difference is that a professor won't teach his students everything he knows, because he feels a need to be above them. A rebbi, on the other hand, will teach everything he knows to his students, because his greatest desire is for them to one day surpass him!' Another difference is that a professor's job is to impart knowledge to his students. But the role of a rebbi is to forge a deep and lasting connection with them." "And what's the difference between the college student and the yeshivah student?' Rav

Shlomo continued. 'Have you ever met a college graduate reviewing the material he learned in college, just for the sake of knowledge itself? Never! He will only review the material he needs for his career. The yeshivah student, on the other hand, will review what he learned in yeshivah over and over again for the rest of his life. Because he is in love with the Torah!"

From You Made My Life! By Rabbi Nachman Rothenberg. Published by Israel Bookshop

H. TO DO IT YOURSELF AND NOT THROUGH AN AGENT

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Whenever a person can fulfill a commandment personally, he should perform it himself rather than delegating it to an agent. As our Sages established as a foundational halachic principle (Kiddushin 41a): 'It is a greater mitzvah to perform it oneself than through an emissary' (mitzvah bo yoser mi-bishlucho). Exemplifying this devotion, the greatest Talmudic sages (Amoraim) personally performed physical preparations in honor of Shabbos — such as salting the fish, lighting the lamps, and stoking the fires — regarding direct physical exertion for a mitzvah as their highest honor (Shabbos 119a).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky was the previous Rosh Yeshivah of Ner Yisrael. For a year and a half, one of Rav Kulefsky's talmidim lived with his wife and family in the same building as the Kulefskys, in "401," as it is known in Yeshivah Lane. This talmid had many encounters with his esteemed neighbor, some of them humorous, but all memorable and meaningful. One Erev Shabbos, the talmid drove into the parking lot of 401 just as Rav Kulefsky walked out the back entrance, holding a bag filled with garbage. The talmid quickly jumped out of his car and ran over to offer to take the trash bag and throw it into the dumpster. But Rav Kulefsky pulled it away from him and declared with a twinkle in his eye, "This is my mitzvah! You get your own garbage!" The rebbetzin did not drive a car. Although Baltimore has buses, the system is not as user-friendly as in other cities. Rav Kulefsky took it upon himself to drive his wife to the grocery store each week and to any other stores she had to shop at. He did this happily and graciously. Many talmidim, as well as other Baltimore residents, remember seeing Rav Kulefsky sitting in his car (which did not have air conditioning for many years) in the parking lot of the local supermarket, learning from a huge pile of sefarim as he calmly waited for his wife to complete her purchases. Some took advantage of the chance to talk to him in learning right then and there in the parking lot. At times, he even gave oral semichah tests while waiting in the car. If circumstances warranted, it was not unusual to meet him in the store on his own.

From Rav Kulefsky, By Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

I. NOT TO PASS OVER THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

When an opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, a person must seize and fulfill it immediately rather than bypassing it to perform a different commandment. As Chazal established (Yoma 33a; Megillah 6b): 'One does not bypass commandments' (ein ma'avirin al ha-mitzvos). Setting aside an available mitzvah exhibits a slight

to its divine dignity; whatever sacred duty Hashem places before a person must be embraced without delay.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Why does the Torah command us never to pass over or skip a mitzvah that comes to our hand—never calculating 'This mitzvah looks small and unimportant so I will skip it, and I will only bother with big mitzvos'? In Devarim Rabbah (Parshah 6, Siman 2), Rabbi Abba bar Kahana explained that this is the exact reason the Almighty hid the reward of each individual mitzvah in the Torah. He compared it to a King who hired laborers and brought them into his royal orchard to plant and tend his trees, without telling them the wage for each type of tree. At sunset, the King summoned each worker to pay him. He asked the first: 'Under which tree did you work today?' The worker pointed and said, 'Under this tree.' The King said: 'That is a pepper tree—its wage is one gold dinar!' He asked the second: 'Under which tree did you work?' He pointed to another tree, and the King said: 'That is a white-blossom tree—its wage is half a gold coin!' He asked the third: 'Under which tree did you work?' He pointed, and the King said: 'That is an olive tree—its wage is two hundred silver zuz!' The workers exclaimed: 'Your Majesty, shouldn't you have told us in advance which tree paid the highest wage so we could all work under that tree?!' The King smiled and replied: 'Had I revealed the prices in advance, everyone would have abandoned the rest of the trees—and how would my entire orchard ever have been planted and tended?!'

Midrash Rabbah — Devarim Rabbah 6:2

J. NOT TO DO MANY MITZVOS AT ONCE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should not combine multiple commandments to be performed simultaneously as a single package, because doing so prevents him from giving each sacred act its proper reverence, undivided focus, and meticulous care. As our Sages established (Pesachim 102b; Sotah 8a): 'We do not perform mitzvos in bundles' (ein osin mitzvos chavilos chavilos). Each commandment deserves its own dedicated vessel of intention and honor, rather than being treated like an administrative burden to be hastily discharged.

K. NOT TO DO IT IN A DEMEANING WAY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

As it says, "you shall pour it and cover" (Vayikra 17:13 Parshas Acharei Mos)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must treat every commandment with the utmost dignity and respect, ensuring it is never performed in a disparaging or casual manner. This principle is derived from the mitzvah of covering the blood of slaughtered fowl or wild animals (kisui ha-dam), where Scripture states: 'He shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth' (Vayikra 17:13). The Talmud expounds (Chullin 87a) that with the same limb that poured the blood — the hands — one must cover it, and not kick dirt over it with one's foot, so that the mitzvos do not appear degraded in his eyes. Chazal establish this halachah as a universal paradigm for all commandments. Hashem states: 'One must

honor My commandments, for they are My royal emissaries, and an emissary of a person is like the person himself (shelucho shel adam k'moso). Consequently, honoring My mitzvos is equivalent to honoring Me, while treating My mitzvos with disdain is equivalent to disrespecting Me.'

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ We learned in the Mishnah (Avos 1:13): "And one who makes personal use of the crown of Torah passes away from the world." Reish Lakish taught: This refers to someone who accepts personal service from a person who studies halachos, which are the crown of Torah. And Ulla said: A person may accept service from someone who has learned the four orders of Mishnah, but may not accept service from someone who teaches the four orders of Mishnah. This is illustrated by the incident of Reish Lakish, who was walking along the road when he came to a pool of gathered water blocking the path. A certain man came over, lifted Reish Lakish onto his shoulders, and began carrying him across the water. While on his shoulders, Reish Lakish asked him: "Have you studied Scripture (Mikra)?" The man answered him: "I have studied Scripture." Reish Lakish asked: "Have you studied Mishnah?" The man answered: "I have studied four orders of Mishnah!" Shocked, Reish Lakish exclaimed to him: "You have carved out for yourself four mighty mountains of Torah (whereas people call me an uprooter of only two mountains), and yet you are carrying the son of Lakish on your shoulders?! Throw the son of Lakish into the water at once!" The man pleaded with him: "Master, it pleases me with all my heart to serve you!" Reish Lakish replied: "If so — since a person is forbidden to be served by someone else's Torah student, but a teacher is permitted to be served by his own student — learn from me this single teaching of Rabbi Zeira right now so that you become my student: Rabbi Zeira stated that the daughters of Israel undertook the stringency upon themselves that even if they see a drop of blood no larger than a mustard seed, they wait seven clean days on account of it!"

Talmud Bavli, Megillah 28b

21. Not to Delay Mitzvos (Zerizus)

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

As it says "you shall guard the matzoh (mitzvah)" (Shemos 12:17 Parshas Bo)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must never allow a mitzvah to become 'leavened' (chimutz) through procrastination. When an opportunity to perform a commandment reaches your hand, execute it immediately without delaying until tomorrow, as Scripture states regarding Pesach: 'And you shall guard the matzos' (u-sh'martem es ha-matzos; Shemos 12:17). Our Sages expounded (Mechilta, Bo 9): 'Do not read it only as matzos, but as mitzvos — when a mitzvah comes to your hand, do not allow it to ferment through delay.' Moshe Rabbeinu exemplified this supreme alacrity (zerizus). Even when Hashem told him, 'Avenge the vengeance of the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you shall be gathered unto your people' (Bamidbar 31:2) — meaning his physical life would conclude once the campaign ended — Moshe mobilized the nation with swift eagerness, placing the divine command above his own longevity. Conversely, because Yehoshua delayed the conquest of the Land of Israel, ten years were deducted from his lifespan; he lived to 110 years rather than the 120 of Moshe (Tanchuma, Pinchas 1).

Inspirational Reflection: Living with Divine Alacrity (Zerizus)

Those who remember the great posek Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l from the 1950s and 1960s observed that his daily schedule was calibrated with such extraordinary discipline that neighborhood residents set their watches by his departure and return from shul. So fiercely did he guard every passing second from being wasted that Jerusalemites quipped that the city traffic lights seemed timed to his rhythmic stride: as he walked to the Beis Din HaGadol, the pedestrian signals would turn green the precise moment his foot reached the edge of the curb (Rav Elyashiv, by Yehuda and Malky Heimowitz, Mesorah Publications, p. 221).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ As Rav Avrohom Dovid Sauer stood at the entrance of Baltimore's Kosher Bite Restaurant, he was overcome with a feeling of relief and joy. Before him stood Rabbi Ervin Preis. Rabbi of Suburban Orthodox Congregation, appearing healthy and in good spirits. Rabbi Preis had been in failing health with a terminal illness, so R' Avraham Dovid couldn't believe Rabbi Preis was actually out and about as if everything were perfectly fine. Although R' Avraham Dovid was neither a congregant in Rabbi Preis' shul nor a personal acquaintance, he, along with the entire Baltimore community, was davening for Rabbi Preis' recovery. Hesitantly, R' Avraham Dovid approached Rabbi Preis to wish him Shalom Aleichem. Rabbi Preis shook his hand warmly, and R' Avraham Dovid asked Rabbi Preis how he was feeling. With his characteristically congenial style, Rabbi Preis answered. "Baruch Hashem, I am doing much better." Apologetically, he added, "Please forgive me: you look familiar, but I cannot remember your name." R' Avraham Dovid told Rabbi Preis his name and, without missing a beat, Rabbi Preis continued, "Of course, I should have recognized you! You are Avrahom Dovid, the son of Channah Machlah. How is the rest of your family: your father, Moshe the son of Adele, your mother, Channah Machlah the daughter of Sorah Miriam, and your five siblings?" With incredible accuracy, Rabbi Preis mentioned each of R' Avraham Dovid's siblings by name. "How do you know the Hebrew names of all the members of my family? You even know all of my grandparents' names!" exclaimed R' Avraham Dovid in amazement. "Yes, I actually do know your entire family by name, but probably not by face. There's an easy explanation for this. About thirteen years ago, I called your father, the owner of Security Unlimited, to install an alarm system in our home. Your father spent many hours installing the system. When he was ready to leave late at night, he handed me the bill, which was clearly far lower than I knew it should have been. When I questioned him, your father's response was that he was giving me a discount because I am a Rabbi. I told him I felt uncomfortable receiving this discount. Your father replied, 'Well, then, I'll make a deal with you. In return for this discount, I ask that you have my family in mind in your tefillos. Please ask Hashem to watch over us.' "I accepted your father's condition," continued Rabbi Preis. "Every day for the past thirteen years, I have remembered each member of your family in my prayers. I am just keeping my end of the bargain." Unfortunately, only a few months later, Rabbi Preis was niftar. This conversation remains etched clearly in R' Avraham Dovid's mind. When doing business himself, R' Avraham Dovid remembers the lesson Rabbi Preis taught him about keeping one's end of a deal. Without a doubt, Rabbi Preis is still appealing to the Kisei HaKavod for the welfare of the Sauer family and, indeed, the entire Jewish nation. After all. a deal is a deal.

For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ In Safed there was a tzaddik, a kabbalist, Rabbi Avraham Galanti, who once came to the Arizal with a request that he reprimand him and help him correct his misdeeds. The Ari refused, saying that he was hardly one who could give mussar to so great a tzaddik, but Rabbi Avraham persisted in his demands. The Ari then studied his face and said, "I see that you have a slight defect and that you are in wrongful possession of others' property. " Rabbi Avraham was shocked, and promptly went home to don sack cloth and accept a fast, with intense soul-searching as to where he might have been dishonest, but to no avail. Rabbi Avraham operated a textile factory. He called together all his workers and asked, "Am I in arrears to any

of you? Have I inadvertently withheld wages from anyone?" The workers responded, "Rabbi, whatever you give us is enough. The Divine blessing is in your money, and whatever we receive always goes far enough to cover our needs. " ' - Rabbi Avraham said, "Then that is the problem. I may have shortchanged you on your wages, but you have never complained. That is why the Ari found me sinful. Henceforth you must be specific and make certain you receive every cent that is due to you. "But I must make restitution for the past, " he said. Rabbi Avraham then placed money on the table and said, "Let anyone come and take as much as they feel is coming to him. Then I wish you to say, 'Whatever Avraham Galanti still owes me, I forgive him with all my heart!'" i Except for one woman who took a few coins, no one touched the money on the table, and all recited the forgiveness formula as requested. Rabbi Avraham later returned to the Ari who said, "The stain has now been cleansed. It was the small amount of money that was due to that woman that had left its mark on your neshamah."

Not Just Stories, By Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

❖ A tailor made an outfit for Reb Zusha's wife. When he presented her with the finished product, he gave a sigh. "What's wrong?" she asked. "My daughter is engaged," he answered sadly, "and she saw me making this beautiful outfit. She thought it was for her. I'm not even close to being able to afford such an outfit for her." Reb Zusha's wife felt terrible for the man. She told him to keep the outfit and give it to his daughter. When Reb Zusha heard what happened, he had one question. "Did you pay him for his work?" "No, why should I?" "Because he worked a full week for you. It's very noble of you to give up the outfit, but he has to be paid for the job he did." She went back and paid him.

Living In His Image Master Curriculum Archive

A. TO LOOK FORWARD TO DOING IT

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah)

As it says, "and you should learn them and guard them to perform that (Devarim 5:1, Parshas Va'eschanan)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should eagerly anticipate and yearn for the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah, constantly waiting for the moment he can perform the Creator's will. As Scripture states: 'And you shall study them, and guard to perform them' (Devarim 5:1). The biblical term 'to guard' (shemirah) denotes yearning anticipation, precisely as Scripture records regarding Yaakov Avinu after Yosef shared his prophetic dreams: 'And his father guarded the matter' (Bereishis 37:11) — meaning he waited with watchful longing for its fulfillment (Rashi, ad loc.).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi and Rebbetzin Machlis were renowned for their exceptional performance of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim. One of their Shabbos guests related the following beautiful anecdote. "I was there one Shabbos night when the house was full. There must have been a hundred people there. In the middle of the seudah, there's a knock on the door. Someone outside says, "We have a group of people who would like to come in." The house is full and there is no more space. Rebbetzin Machlis says, "Bring them in!" We figure two or three people, but when I opened the door and looked outside, it's like never ending. There are fifty people! It's summer, and there's a grassy area in front of the Machlis apartment, between the apartment blocks. Rabbi Machlis says, "You know what? I think we'll have the seudah outside." Rebbetzin Machlis says to all of us who were already seated, "We are all part of this mitzvah now." We take all the tables outside and find some

more tables, and it's as if nothing has happened. They make all the people who were already there part of the mitzvah. Rabbi Machlis says, "Look what Hashem gave us! Hashem gave every one of us, this opportunity to invite another fifty people!" At least for me, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Machlis, were like Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu.

From Emunah With Love and Chicken Soup, By Sara Yocheved Rigler, Published by Shaar Press

B. TO BEAUTIFY THE MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim page 16

As it says, "this is my God and I will beautify it" (Shemos 15:2 Parshas Beshalach)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred obligation to beautify the performance of every commandment (hiddur mitzvah), as Scripture proclaims: 'This is my God, and I will beautify Him' (Shemos 15:2). Our Sages expounded (Shabbos 133b): 'Beautify yourself before Him through the mitzvos: acquire a beautiful esrog, a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful tallis with tzitzis, and a beautiful Sefer Torah written with fine ink and wrapped in exquisite silks.' The Talmud further establishes (Bava Kama 9b) that a person should be prepared to expend up to an additional third beyond the baseline cost of an item to enhance its aesthetic and spiritual grandeur.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

There was a certain gadol hador who lived in Bnei Brak. Since he was the gadol hador, he was asked to be a sandek at a bris nearly every day. After this gadol was niftar he left his weekday talis as a yerusha, an inheritance, for his grandchild. The talis of this tzadik was very precious to this grandson. It was worn by a great tzadik and it was imbued with much holiness. However the talis was quite old and worn, and because it went to so many brisim, there were many wine stains on the talis. The grandchild tried his best to clean the stains but most were permanently embedded. There is a mitzvah of hidur mitzvah, to do a mitzvah in the most beautiful way possible. This grandchild wondered which would be preferred, should he buy a brand new talis that would be clean and use that one as a beautification of his mitzvah? Or perhaps, his grandfather's talis, although not as aesthetically pleasing, would be better to use because it was the talis of a great tzadik? He asked this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think would be a greater mitzvah, to buy a new one, or should he use his grandfather's?

Answer: Regarding the question about the stained talis from the gadol, Rav Zilberstein cited the Chasom Sofer who quotes the Yerushalmi that wearing the clothing of a gadol has kedushah that can uplift a person. It is therefore an inyan to wear his grandfather's talis. However he should only do it if all the other people who daven with him understand that this is the gadol's talis, and why it is stained. Otherwise it would be preferable to wear a clean talis.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 168 (Table Talk Edition 267)

A generous donor wishes to commission a new Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark) for a synagogue and is presented with two architectural plans: one is plated in pure gold and is far more expensive, while the other is crafted from intricately carved wood that is less expensive than gold but visually much more breathtaking. For the mitzvah of hiddur mitzvah (beautifying a mitzvah), which takes priority: the design that costs more money (gold), or the design that is more

aesthetically beautiful (carved wood)?

Answer: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 47) rules that he should choose the gold-plated Aron Kodesh that costs more money. Drawing on the Ohr HaChaim (Shemos 25:7) regarding the superiority of gifts that entail greater financial expenditure (chisaron kis) and the Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 6:1) teaching that intrinsic material superiority (meshubach b'gufo) takes precedence over external visual appearance (meshubach b'mar'av), a more expensive and intrinsically precious material like gold overrides a cheaper material even when the carved wood is more visually striking.

— Source: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 47

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Mordechai of Neshchiz saved his pennies all year around in order to have enough money to buy an esrog (citron) for the mitzvah of the four species on Succos. On the way to buy the esrog, he encountered a man who was weeping bitterly and his inquiry revealed that this man had made his meager living as a porter, hauling things by horse and wagon. That day his horse had perished, and he was now without a means of livelihood. Rabbi Mordechai promptly gave the man the entire of sum of money he had saved throughout the year; in order that he might buy another horse. The man rushed off overjoyed, and Rabbi Mordechai turned his eyes to heaven saying, "Dear G-d, all other Jews will fulfill the mitzvah of the four species with an esrog, but I will do so with a horse." '.

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

C. TO DO IT WITH ZEAL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah)

As it is written "and Abraham got up early" (Bereishis 22:3 Parshas Vayeira)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must perform every mitzvah with fervent alacrity (zerizus). Whenever a commandment is to be fulfilled during the daytime, one should awaken early to execute it, emulating the paradigm of Avraham Avinu, of whom Scripture testifies: 'And Avraham arose early in the morning' (Bereishis 22:3). From this our Sages established the rule: 'The zealous act early to perform commandments' (zerizin makdimin l'mitzvos; Pesachim 4a). Likewise, for any mitzvah designated for the night, one should fulfill it at the earliest onset of the night. Our Sages taught (Nazir 23b) that one should always precede others in seizing a mitzvah, noting that merely because the elder daughter of Lot preceded her younger sister by a single night in what she believed was a life-saving mission, her descendants merited entry into the royal line of David four generations before the descendants of the younger sister.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTERS, VOL. 6, P. 7)

The yetzer hara does not only entice a person to commit transgressions; he works relentlessly to ensure that when a mitzvah is available, a person will delay or perform it with lethargy. Man's physical nature is naturally drawn to comfort, ease, and relaxation; overcoming this inertia requires deliberate spiritual effort. Zrizus (alacrity) means

seizing the opportunity immediately, for every second of procrastination creates a fresh opening for the yetzer hara to manufacture new excuses. Furthermore, zrizus demands perseverance: having the grit and determination to see a holy task through to its complete finish.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The Prophet Yirmiyahu asked before Hashem: "Righteous are You, O Hashem, when I contend with You, yet I would speak judgments with You: Why does the way of the wicked (Nebuchadnezzar) prosper?" And what did Heaven answer him? "If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you, how then will you compete with horses?" (Yirmiyahu 12:1, 5). What did Heaven mean by this answer? The Gemara explains: This may be compared to a certain man who boasted: "I can run three parsahs (twelve miles) ahead of galloping horses through muddy marsh water!" A single foot-runner happened to meet him, and the boastful man ran ahead of him for just three miles on dry, level ground — and collapsed in exhaustion. People said to him: "Look at yourself! If before a single foot-runner you are already exhausted like this, how much more so before galloping horses! And if after just three miles you are exhausted like this, how much more so after three parsahs (twelve miles)! And if on dry, firm land you are exhausted like this, how much more so through muddy marsh water!" So too, Heaven said to Yirmiyahu: "If you are overwhelmed and astonished at the reward for just four steps that I paid to that wicked man Nebuchadnezzar, who ran four steps after My honor — when I pay the eternal reward to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who ran before Me tirelessly like horses through fire and water, how much more so will you be astonished!" The Gemara immediately asks: And what were those four steps that Nebuchadnezzar ran? When King Hezekiah of Judah fell mortally ill and recovered, the Holy One, blessed be He, performed a miracle and caused the sun to move backward ten steps (II Melachim 20:11). That day, Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylonia — whose habit was to eat his meal at the sixth hour of the day and sleep until the ninth hour — woke up from his nap and saw the sun shining back in the morning sky! Thinking his servants had let him sleep through the entire night until the next morning, he wanted to execute them. They said to him: "My lord, it is the same day — the God of Hezekiah turned the sun back ten steps when Hezekiah recovered!" Amazed, Merodach-Baladan exclaimed: "Is there such a great person and God in the world, and I do not send him greetings?!" So his scribes wrote a letter: "Peace to King Hezekiah, peace to the city of Jerusalem, and peace to the Great God!" Now Nebuchadnezzar was Merodach-Baladan's chief scribe and proofreader, and he happened to be out when the courier left with the letter. When Nebuchadnezzar returned and asked, "How did you write the letter?", they told him: "We wrote: 'Peace to King Hezekiah, peace to the city of Jerusalem, and peace to the Great God!'" Nebuchadnezzar cried out: "You call Him 'the Great God,' and yet you write His Name at the very end of the letter?!" He immediately jumped up and ran four steps after the royal courier to bring back the letter and rewrite it with "Peace to the Great God" at the very top — and because of those four steps that he ran for Hashem's honor, Heaven granted him world sovereignty!

Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 96a

D. TO DO IT WITH OTHERS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should strive to fulfill commandments communally rather than in isolation, for 'in the multitude of people is the King's glory' (b'rov am hadras Melech; Mishlei 14:28). Regarding Torah study, Scripture warns: 'A sword is upon the solitary, and they shall become foolish' (Yirmiyahu 50:36), which our Sages expound (Berachos 63b; Ta'anis 7a) as a stern rebuke against those who isolate themselves to learn without companions, noting that

solitary study dims intellectual clarity and fosters foolishness. The same principle applies across all commandments: divine reward is magnified when an obligation is discharged in unison. Thus, during the sacrificial service of the Korban Pesach in the Beis HaMikdash, the kohanim stood in continuous lines, passing the basins of blood from one to another until reaching the altar, intentionally engaging the multitude in the sacred rite rather than having a single individual carry the vessel alone (Pesachim 64a–b).

E. NOT TO TRY TO DO IT FOR FREE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah),

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should never seek to fulfill a mitzvah free of charge or at discounted expense; rather, he should acquire its ritual necessities at full cost with a generous, willing spirit, emulating King David who declared: 'I will not offer burnt offerings to Hashem my God for free' (Shmuel II 24:24). The holy Zohar (Terumah 128a) explains that unholy forces (sitra achra) seek to attach themselves to holy deeds obtained casually without personal sacrifice. By investing one's hard-earned resources gladly for the sake of Heaven, a person purges all impure attachments and elevates the mitzvah to complete spiritual purity.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Akiva once asked Rabbi Nechunyah HaGadol: “By what merit have you lived such a long life?” When Rabbi Nechunyah’s attendants heard this question, they misunderstood and thought Rabbi Akiva was complaining that their master had lived too long, so they came running to strike him. Rabbi Akiva quickly climbed up and sat at the top of a tall date palm (hinting to Rabbi Nechunyah: ‘The righteous shall flourish like a date palm’ [Tehillim 92:13]). From the top of the tree, to prove to them that he was a Torah scholar asking out of genuine desire to learn, he called out a Torah question to Rabbi Nechunyah: “Rabbi, regarding the daily offering, if the Torah already says ‘a lamb’ (Bamidbar 28:4), why does it also add the word ‘one’?” Recognizing his scholarship at once, Rabbi Nechunyah told his attendants: “He is a young Torah scholar — leave him alone!” He then answered Rabbi Akiva’s question: “‘One’ teaches that they must select the most choice and unique lamb in its flock.” Then Rabbi Nechunyah answered Rabbi Akiva’s question about how he merited long life: “In all my days, I never accepted gifts, I never insisted on retaliating when wronged (nor collected the fine owed to an insulted scholar), and I was generous with my own money (which came purely from my own honest toil, since I never took gifts).” The Gemara illustrates: “I never accepted gifts” — like the practice of Rabbi Elazar, who, whenever they sent him gifts from the house of the Nasi (the Prince), would refuse to take them; and whenever they invited him to dine at the Nasi’s table, he would not go. He said to them: “Do you not want me to live?! For it is written: ‘He who hates gifts shall live’ (Mishlei 15:27)!” Rabbi Zeira, however, whenever they sent him gifts from the house of the Nasi, would not take them; yet whenever they invited him to dine with them, he would go. He explained: “They feel honored by having me sit at their table — so by attending their meal, I am actually giving honor to them rather than taking a gift from them!”

Talmud Bavli, Megillah 28a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One year before Sukkos, an attempt was made to set a limit to the price of esrogim. Even though this might seem like a reasonable idea, the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky) opposed it. The more money people spend on mitzvos, he felt, the better it looks in the Heavenly tribunals when accusations are made against a generation which spends large amounts on frivolities.

The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS, p. 139

22. Not to Perform Mitzvos Mechanically (Kavanah)

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-27

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must continuously prepare his heart and mind with conscious reverence (yiras Hashem), ensuring that his religious life never degenerates into cold, mechanical routine. Concerning those who perform commandments purely out of unthinking habit, the prophet Yeshayahu lamented: 'Their fear of Me has become like a commandment of men learned by rote (mitzvas anashim melumadah); therefore, behold, I will continue to confound this people with wonders and marvels' (Yeshayahu 29:13–14). The prophet Yirmiyahu similarly rebuked superficial worship that lacks inward devotion: 'You are near in their mouths, but far from their innermost thoughts' (Yirmiyahu 12:2). True divine service demands fresh vitality, interior contemplation, and genuine awe of the Almighty.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. Obviously, a mitzvah done conscientiously and with mindfulness will help refine us much more than one that is done by rote.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 16)

An essential key to performing mitzvos lishma is hazmana — deliberate preparation before performing the deed. When a person rushes into a mitzvah without mental preparation, routine and thoughtlessness inevitably take over, reducing the act to mere habit.

SFAS EMES

• The midrash on "Hear O Israel, today you are crossing over" — you have ruined "we will do" (na'aseh), so be careful with "we will hear and understand" (nishma). The Sfas Emes explains how this works: the essence of fear must be in the very bone of the man, in his recognition of the Creator, and that happens when the body is rectified. The inner hearing restores the inner sight, and then dread comes unbidden, like the angels'. The heart of the lesson is clear: rote fear is learned fear because the body is still the concealer; the deed of spiritual

rectification (tikkun) is what turns learning into being. The mechanical Jew studies dread; the rectified Jew exudes it. The difference between rote mechanical habit (mitzvas anashim melumadah) and true yirah is not information but location: one lives in the lesson, the other in the bone (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5656).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the Midrash on "the entire commandment" (kol ha-mitzvah) as a warning against approaching mitzvos as disconnected tasks. He describes Torah and mitzvos as the source of real spiritual life, but that life reaches a particular person only according to the toil and participation that person brings. An outward deed can be performed while its inner voice remains inaudible. The requirement is therefore not to do the commandment merely through habit, but to submit oneself to and connect with its inner spiritual essence (penimiyus). His interpretation assigns agency to the mitzvah itself, but without relieving the human being of effort: the heavenly invitation can become audible only through active readiness to receive it (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5631).

• In the discussion of the continual fire of the korban olah, the Sfas Emes introduces Chazal's distinction: an aveirah may extinguish a mitzvah, whereas it does not extinguish Torah. He explains this with an image drawn from fire itself. The Torah is the body of the flame, whose power survives the contamination that can affect an individual lamp. A mitzvah is compared to the vessel in which fire is held. When foreign material adheres to the lamp, the flame may fail to take hold. In spiritual terms, an act of avodah performed without its internal light can be obstructed by the competing pull of sin. When we perform a mitzvah with heartfelt joy and Torah illumination rather than rote mechanical habit (mitzvas anashim melumadah), the sacred flame takes hold within our soul (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tzav 5637).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the declaration "I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten" (Devarim 26:13) through Chazal's reading: I did not perform a mitzvah without reciting a blessing over it. He asks why the Torah frames proper mitzvah performance in terms of remembrance. His answer is that the act is a vessel for renewing an inner Divine point that ordinary nature conceals. A person may move through religious motions yet fulfill an action without remembering or realizing what he is doing. The mitzvah then remains caught in the same concealment that pervades ordinary routines. The pre-mitzvah brachah thus prepares a change in the performer, far more than a verbal preface. It is intended to keep the act spiritually present to the person who performs it (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5659).

• The luhos sheniyos were given from below, within time and boundary, after the sin, unlike the first Luchos, which were entirely the work of Heaven. Onto this the Sfas Emes lays the prophet's words: Israel adds no strength; they live only on the strength rooted in them by the forefathers. The mechanism of second-tablet Judaism: the deed is possible, the form intact, the writing still the higher soul (neshamah) from above — but the reservoir is inherited, not earned. The letters are from above; the tablets are ours. Rote is the refusal of that meeting: the body shows up, the soul does not. Add the soul, and the account begins to grow again (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5651).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In Semmering, talmidim were sometimes surprised to see the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, going for his daily walk on a road that he normally did not use for this purpose. One talmid, however, explained this by recalling the time when the Rosh Yeshivah went out of his way to enter the beis midrash in the old Manchester Yeshivah building through a

door which was further away from his office. At that time, the Rosh Yeshivah had explained that hergel (habit) should be avoided even in mundane matters, for it can cause a person to go about his service of Hashem as a matter of routine. This was a primary criticism of the Jewish people at the time of the First Destruction!"

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

23. To Serve Hashem Out of Pure Love, Not for Reward

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-13

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should strive to serve Hashem out of pure, unadulterated love rather than for self-serving compensation. As Antignos of Socho taught (Pirkei Avos 1:3): 'Do not be like servants who serve the master on condition of receiving a reward; rather, be like servants who serve the master without the condition of receiving a reward, and let the awe of Heaven be upon you.' Serving the Creator out of love elevates man above transactional calculations, transforming his divine worship into an unshakeable bond with the Infinite.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. A mitzvah done for reward is ultimately done for somewhat selfish motives. Doing a mitzvah out of love for Hashem is rather another demonstration of selflessness and helps to mold us into more selfless people.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 16)

The supreme manifestation of love for Hashem is serving Him purely lishma (for His sake alone), devoid of any expectation of personal gain or pride. The Torah demands our inner heart ("Rachmana liba ba'i"); without genuine intention of the heart, a mitzvah remains hollow.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 17)

If a person is constantly pursuing physical indulgence and public acclaim, it is virtually impossible to keep his mitzvos pure of ulterior motives.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes begins from Hashem's designation of Klal Yisrael as witnesses: “You are My witnesses” (atem eidai). Why, then, are mitzvos capable of witnessing to Hashem's greatness? He answers that the Jewish people serve not for their personal reward but out of dedication to Hashem's will, often even surrendering their lives for His Name. This gives their avodah the character of credible testimony. He makes the logic explicit. If their deeds were driven primarily by the desire to receive payment, observers could explain the behavior as self-interest, not

as a response to Hashem's greatness. Serving Hashem out of pure devotion rather than for personal reward (she-lo al menas lekabeil peras) makes Klal Yisrael authentic witnesses to the Creator's majesty (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Chukas 5637).

• The mishnah seems to leave the servant with no dignity at all. If the highest form of divine service is to do mitzvos without any thought of reward, then exile — when Israel serves in the mode of servitude (avdus) rather than the intimacy of children (banim) — looks like a demotion, a darkness to be endured rather than a place of achievement. And what is more, the verse itself calls the Shabbos relationship one of sonship, as if the weekday servant will always be the lesser figure. How, then, can the midrash praise Israel as an understanding servant (eved maskil), as though the servant-mode itself contained a wisdom greater than sonship? Hence the verse the wise servant rules over the disgraceful son. The one who serves without reckoning a reward does not lose the wage; he wins a higher one, the revealed soul of the son (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5662).

• The Sfas Emes places side by side the many separate mitzvos with the Torah-light that unites them. Individual deeds are “a mitzvah is a lamp” (ner mitzvah), differentiated lamps; their root is “the light of Torah” (or Torah), a single unbroken illumination. He reads the rabbinic warning through the word reward (peras) itself: it denotes a portion or share. The person working for a portion has already placed the service inside a framework of divisible compensation. But the highest relationship that Torah offers is an indivisible unity, not a set of discrete spiritual payments. This reading of reward (peras) is important because the word becomes more than a discussion of compensation. It reveals the difference between a fragmented orientation and the limitless unity sought through serving Hashem for its own sacred sake (lishmah) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5657).

• The Sfas Emes reads "to love Hashem — and to serve Him with all your heart and soul" together with Rashi's warning not to study Torah merely in order to receive reward. The answer is that “unto love” (le-ahavah) is not an incidental feeling one may have alongside obedience. It is the destination to which the mitzvos themselves are leading. He calls the commandments counsels or means by which a person learns to serve through reverent awe (yirah) and love (ahavah). The doubling “If you will surely hearken” (shamo'a tishme'u) is significant to his reading. It differs from his Chukas argument that reward-seeking would invalidate a person's role as a witness to Hashem. This is why the doubled language of hearing matters: the first listening establishes the act, while a deeper listening gradually transforms the actor's inner qualities (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5642).

• In Parshas Beha'aloscha (5655), the Sfas Emes contrasts Hashem's command to Moshe (“Gather for Me seventy men”)—with the craving of the Asafsuf who wept for the fish of Egypt, reading their mistake in light of Antigonos Ish Socho's teaching (Avos 1:3): “Do not be like servants who serve the master in order to receive a reward (pras).” Even the Asafsuf were lofty individuals with spiritual intentions: they craved physical food so that they might elevate holy sparks as they had done in Egypt and thereby acquire personal spiritual stature—an individual profit they did not feel when eating the effortless Manna. Yet the Sfas Emes reveals that seeking even spiritual self-aggrandizement is still a subtle form of serving for a reward. True service out of love (asfah li—'for My sake') means desiring solely to fulfill the will of our Father in Heaven in whatever way He chooses to guide us (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Beha'alosecha 5655).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When Rabbi Aba arrived in a town, he used to proclaim aloud in the streets: 'Whoever wants wealth in this world and long life in the World to Come — let him come and occupy himself with the Torah!' Everyone gathered around him, including a young bachelor from the neighborhood who came up to Rabbi Aba and said frankly: 'Master, I want to study Torah so that I will become rich!' Rabbi Aba welcomed him warmly and began teaching him day after day. After some time, the sweetness and love of the Torah entered deep into the young man's heart! One day Rabbi Aba found the young man sitting alone and weeping. Rabbi Aba asked him: 'My son, why are you crying?' The young man answered through his tears: 'Master! How could I ever trade away eternal life in the World to Come for mere money in this world? I don't want wealth anymore — I only want to merit the Torah for its own sake!' Hearing this, Rabbi Aba rejoiced and saw that the young man was now serving Hashem purely for the sake of Heaven (lishmah)!

Zohar, Volume I (Bereishis), Lech Lecha 89b (26:12–16)

❖ An incident occurred involving a scribe who would travel up to Jerusalem every year. The people of Jerusalem recognized that he was a great man in Torah. They said to him: 'Take fifty gold dinars from us and settle here among us.' He said to them: 'I possess a single grapevine that is more precious to me than everything you offer. It produces three harvests every year, yielding six hundred barrels of wine: the first yields three hundred, the second yields two hundred, and the third yields one hundred, and I sell them for great wealth.' He left them and returned home. And all this blessing in the land was in the merit of the wine libation that was offered upon the Altar.

Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 13:5

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ An officer traveled at the head of a large caravan in order to perform an important task that the king had assigned him. The sun set in the middle of their trip, and spotting an inn alongside the road, they headed directly towards it. The innkeeper was delighted to merit the honor to host the king's officer. He therefore tried his utmost to make his esteemed guests' stay a pleasant one. In their honor, he arranged a table replete with various delicacies, and when they had eaten their fill, he prepared comfortable beds that would provide them with a good night's sleep. Upon rising in the morning, the officer asked the innkeeper how much he owed him for their stay, and the innkeeper requested a substantial sum of money. The officer paid the full amount and thanked the innkeeper. He then took his place at the head of the caravan and continued his journey, quickly forgetting all about the inn and the innkeeper. Several days later, he arrived at another inn, and this time as well, was showered with exceptional hospitality as the innkeeper went well beyond the call of duty. Wanting to please his guests, the innkeeper served them delicious food and beverages, and provided them with comfortable sleeping arrangements as well. The next day, the officer approached the innkeeper and requested to pay for his stay. The innkeeper, however, would not hear of it. "Absolutely not!" he said to the officer. "It is both a pleasure and an honor that a great individual such as yourself would choose to lodge at my inn! The honor you have accorded me will be my full compensation!" Upon hearing the innkeeper's heartfelt words, the officer was filled with tremendous affection for the simple man. He therefore commanded one of his servants to go and bring a particularly heavy chest from one of the wagons. Opening the chest, he removed magnificent jewelry and gems and presented them to the innkeeper. "Here you go, my dear sir," said the officer. "This is a small portion of the reward that you shall receive for the loyalty that you have shown me. In addition, if you ever need anything from the king, do not hesitate to turn to me!" The officer went on his way, but never forgot the innkeeper and his kindliness. There are two types of servants of Hashem, said the Dubno Maggid. The first one serves Hashem in order to receive a reward. Hashem certainly looks upon his Divine service favorably, but he ultimately receives only his due reward. This is not the case, however, with one who serves Hashem with joy over having merited to

serve the King of All Kings. His reward is many times greater and brings Hashem much gratification. This is what Chazal have stated in Avos (1:3): "Be not as servants who serve the master for the sake of receiving [even a token] of reward, but rather, be like servants who serve the master not for the sake of receiving a reward"!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One Leil Shabbos, the Riverdale Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Avrohom Ausband was walking down the street in Riverdale to attend a shalom zachar. Along the way, Rav Avrohom passed a local baal habayis and greeted him with his trademark warm and exuberant "Gut Shabbos! How are you, Reb Yid?" They spoke for a few moments, and the Rosh Yeshivah continued on. Nine months later, the Rosh Yeshivah received a call. It seems there had been another individual standing there, who'd witnessed the exchange. This Yid, who was not shomer Shabbos, turned to his friend and asked, "Who was that man, and why was he so excited?" His friend explained that he's an Orthodox Rabbi and that he's always excited, that's just the way he is. But the man wouldn't let it rest. "If he's so excited, there must be something to it. I need to find out." Nine months later, this man was completely shomer Shabbos. That was the power of Rav Avrohom.

Table Talk, Edition 413 (Parshas Noach), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

24. To Be Bold as a Leopard to Fulfill Hashem's Will

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-17

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught (Pirkei Avos 5:20; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:1): 'Be bold as a leopard, swift as an eagle, fleet as a deer, and courageous as a lion to fulfill the will of your Father in Heaven.' One must harness spiritual boldness (azus d'kedushah) to brush aside social embarrassment and worldly ridicule when performing divine service. In mundane, interpersonal matters, however, arrogance and shamelessness are severely condemned: 'The brazen-faced is destined for Gehinnom, while the bashful (boshes panim) is destined for Gan Eden' (Pirkei Avos 5:20).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)

Being bold as a leopard ("az kanamer") means remaining entirely indifferent to the snickers or criticism of friends when performing a mitzvah. If a person were offered a million dollars, the ridicule of bystanders would never deter him — he knows the true value of what he is obtaining. We must possess that same inner conviction regarding mitzvos, knowing that they yield eternal joy. King David stood before foreign monarchs who boasted of luxury and military conquest; instead of being intimidated, he spoke openly to them of Torah and moral truth, confident in the supreme reality of life.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes confronts a seeming contradiction in the Mishnah's instruction to be bold as a leopard and light as an eagle while serving Hashem. The tradition elsewhere describes Klal Yisrael as a gentle dove, drawn toward its Creator rather than combative or aggressive. How can these opposite traits both be ideals? His answer is that "every trait must be used in its proper time and measure for the service of the Creator"—a Jew should be capable of directing every relevant trait toward the Creator. Spiritual strength does not consist in identifying permanently with one personality style. Sometimes avodah requires boldness (azus), an assertive refusal to be swayed by an opposing force. The spiritual test is therefore not the volume of force a person displays, but whether the selected trait truly fits the duty that Hashem has placed before him (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Beshalach 5655).

• The Sfas Emes gives an elaborate interpretation of "run swift as a deer" (ve-ratz ka-tzvi) by joining it to Chazal's striking description of the deer: its skin is too small to contain its flesh. He takes the image as a remez to the human condition. Hashem breathed a spiritual soul into a bodily frame, yet the body cannot fully contain or express the force of the spirit. The very limitation can increase the soul's yearning toward its origin. The explanation turns the command to "run" from a rule about physical speed into an account of inward longing. The deer comparison gives movement a source in spiritual hunger. The body becomes a participant in that ascent precisely because the soul does not settle for its present level (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5638).

• The Sfas Emes notices that the Greeks were associated with the leopard, an image of boldness or insolence. He then recalls the Mishnah "Be bold as a leopard" (hevei az ka-nameir) and asks how a Jewish virtue can resemble a trait associated with a hostile power. His answer is that a negative force can distort a genuine human capacity, while Israel can recover and redirect that capacity toward Divine service. The conquest is therefore far beyond the destruction of an opponent; it is the return of a misused spiritual power (koach) to its proper purpose. Its historical setting is crucial: the Chanukah victory exposes the difference between refusing surrender to evil and refusing humility before Hashem, which only sound like the same boldness (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Chanukah 5645).

• The Sfas Emes links the Torah's command "Command Aharon" (Tzav es Aharon) with the Midrash about love for Torah and the verse "Many waters cannot extinguish the love". He distinguishes the unfailing inner fire of Torah from the individual mitzvah, which can be diminished by sin or misplaced attention. Chazal therefore compare guarding mitzvos to guarding matzah from becoming chametz. A commandment that comes into a person's hands should be undertaken promptly, before delay turns opportunity into obstruction. He identifies "a protective guard for the commandments" with zealous alacrity (zerizus). The comparison with matzah provides the exact form of the remez: delay is an opening for chametz-like alteration, while prompt fulfillment protects the first purity of the opportunity (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tzav 5659).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai went and fled from Roman persecution to the wilderness of Lod, hiding inside a cave together with his son Rabbi Elazar. A miracle occurred for them: a single carob tree and a spring of fresh water sprouted forth for them. They ate from the fruit of that carob tree and drank from that spring of water. Every single day, Eliyahu the Prophet, remembered for good, would come to them twice a day and teach them the deepest mysteries of the Torah, while no human being in the outside world knew where they were.

Tikkunei Zohar, Hakdamah 17a (Section 1:1)

25. To Relentlessly Wage War Against the Yetzer Hara

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must wage relentless spiritual battle against his evil inclination (yetzer hara), continuously stirring up his good inclination (yetzer tov) to confront and vanquish it. As our Sages taught (Berachos 5a), based on the verse: 'Rouse yourselves and do not sin' (Tehillim 4:5). One must never adopt a passive posture toward the animal impulses, but proactively summon his higher intellect and divine soul to subdue illicit desires before they take root.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to fight our baser impulses and perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes explicitly maps the Gemara's program for confronting temptation onto the sequence of pre-Purim readings. The awakening of generosity and good inclination through Shekalim provides energy for the inner opposition represented by remembering Amalek. But the Gemara does not end with confrontation: if the person cannot defeat the yetzer, it prescribes Krias Shema. Why move from fighting to reciting the declaration of Hashem's unity? His answer is a distinction between two spiritual mechanisms. One sort of yetzer can be opposed directly through “hatred” (sin'ah), determined rejection of what blocks avodah. The alternation itself is the teaching. A person must not mistake the failure of one method as proof that the struggle is impossible when Torah provides another mode of avodah (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas Zachor 5637).

• The Sfas Emes reads Pinchas's reward, “Behold, I give him My covenant of peace”, against the rabbinic directive. Peace, he argues, cannot always be reached by avoiding struggle. Spiritual conflict can be a necessary preparatory stage, just as the six workdays precede the rest of Shabbos. His phrase means that the properly directed struggle is capable of bringing its own later rest. The goal of confrontation is not anger itself, but the clearing of obstacles that prevent a person from finding cleaving to Hashem (dveikus). The crucial distinction is between a struggle sustained for Hashem and agitation generated by ego. Only the former prepares the inward peace described by the covenant (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Pinchas 5635).

• The Or HaChaim comments on the words "from you" (mimecha): all the powers of the sitra achra are from the man himself; yet even so, Hashem your God is with you, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt. The Sfas Emes explains how this works: the Torah exempts from war the one who fears for the sins in his hand; it follows that whoever still has a war has, by definition, the strength to fight it. The war is not evidence of your ruin but of

your commission: no one is drafted who cannot serve. So the standing practice of the gemara — provoke, always — rests on a promise: the fact that you are still fighting is the proof that you can win (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5634).

• The word "ha-yom" ("today") makes the choice present in every new day. The Sfas Emes distinguishes the first tablets, associated with an original unmingled good, from the later human situation in which good and evil are intertwined. Nevertheless, the gift of Torah remains capable of giving new power to choose properly (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Bereishis 5652)

• In the maamar for Parshas Zachor, the Sfas Emes joins the sequence of Shekalim, Zachor, and Parah to the extraction of pure oil from olives. The first pure drop represents the inner holy point of a Jewish soul, the part whose deepest desire is closeness to Hashem. When that point is awakened, it gathers other scattered elements toward itself, making spiritual clarification (birur)—separation of what is holy from what obscures it—possible. The emotional consequence is surprising: genuine love of Hashem can awaken a justified hatred of what obstructs that love. The Sfas Emes does not present ordinary hostility toward people as holy simply because it feels forceful; his discussion is about spiritual clarification (birur) of the inner life and the spiritual opposition represented by Amalek. The process begins with gratitude and voluntary giving; without those earlier stages, the later anger would lack the purified foundation that makes it holy opposition (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas Zachor 5636).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Yetzer Hara, said the Vilna Gaon, will successfully steer a person from the proper path only if he finds a breach in that person's spiritual makeup through which he can enter. This breach is formed, added the Gaon, when a person serves Hashem and performs mitzvos but is not wholehearted in his devotion. It is then that the Yetzer Hara has the ability to infiltrate the breach with ease. However, if a person is firm in his devotions, then the yetzer Hara is powerless against him! The Dubno Maggid compared this to a merchant who loaded his wagon with merchandise and set out for the big city. There he intended to go from door to door peddling his merchandise. However, when the other merchants in the city heard that a competitor had invaded their territory and could potentially impede their business, they had him summoned to a din Torah before the rav of the city. After listening carefully as both sides staked their claims, the rav presented them with a decision: The merchant, said the rav, had the right to sell his merchandise, under three conditions: 1) He would not enter a potential customer's home unless his door was wide open. 2) He would not tell anyone how praiseworthy his merchandise was unless he was asked. 3) Upon leaving a customer's home, he would not exit through the door which he had previously entered. Rather, he would be required to exit through the closest door available. So, too, concluded the Dubno Maggid, in relation to the yetzer hara: 1) The yetzer hara only enters when there is already an opening. 2) He can only praise his "merchandise" to one who is interested in hearing about it. But when it comes to someone who is totally engrossed in Torah, the yetzer hara is not permitted to utter a word. 3) If the yetzer hara has already entered, it is still possible to repent immediately and kick him out through the closest available door!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In a certain city resided an individual. On one occasion, one of the city's scoffers decided to amuse his friends; he told them that later that day, the man would leap into the swamp located on the outskirts of the city. How did he accomplish this? He approached the fool and deceptively offered him various types of sweets, thereby earning his trust. He then suggested that they go for a short stroll outside the city. As they neared the swamp, the scoffer turned to the fool and exclaimed, "I have a great secret which I am prepared to reveal to you, but you must first promise me that you will not disclose it to anyone." The fool promised. "Are you familiar with the big swamp?" asked the scoffer. "I certainly am," responded the fool. "But I heard that it is quite deep and marshy." "That is not true," responded the scoffer. "And what's

more, you should know that a valuable treasure is hidden inside it... "While there is a thin layer of mud that lies on the surface, if one leaps in, he will bypass the mud and merit discovering an enormous treasure." When they arrived at the swamp, the fool, believing the scoffer's words, dived directly into the marshy swamp. "Help me!" screamed the fool. "Get me out of here!" "Absolutely not," replied the scoffer. "Do you know how much effort I exerted just to get you to jump into the swamp in the first place? First I will call all of my friends, so that they can see you sunken up to your neck and get a hearty laugh. Only afterwards will I take you out..." So, too, remarked the Chofetz Chaim, is the way of the yetzer hara. First it entices an individual with meaningless temptations, even giving him fancy gifts and the like, which serve to ensnare him. However, once man has been successfully lured — sunk in the swamp — the yetzer hara stands there and laughs heartily...

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rav Ofer Heiman recalls Reb Shmuel Auerbach once telling him that Rav Shach wanted Maalos HaTorah to grow into a yeshiva with a thousand talmidim. "But," Reb Shmuel said to Reb Ofer, "I don't know how that's possible. Forty talmidim is already too big for me. I need to understand a bachur in all his depth, to carry him and guide him. Just to be a Rosh Yeshivah of a thousand boys and say a shiur klali—I don't have such a yetzer hara." And yet, Reb Ofer observes, although Maalos HaTorah never grew very large at all, the list of talmidim who grew into talmidei chachamim within its walls is completely out of proportion to that of any other yeshiva—because here there was an abba who spurred each talmid to grow in keeping with who he was.

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

❖ A fabric merchant traveled to a big city in order to purchase material from the wholesalers there. He entered the store of a wholesaler and saw fabrics that were truly magnificent to behold. "Tell me, please," he asked the wholesaler. "Your fabrics are certainly beautiful, but how can I determine if they are of outstanding quality? Will they endure for an extended period of time?" "That is not very difficult to ascertain," responded the wholesaler. "I'll give you the names of three individuals who had suits sewn from my fabrics. Ask them for their opinions." The merchant took the wholesaler's advice and spoke with the three men he had mentioned. Indeed, each one lauded the fabrics with praise and told the merchant that they were extremely pleased. On his way back to the wholesaler, the merchant entered another store that was likewise selling exquisite fabrics. He approached the storeowner and told him all that had happened. "You are very fortunate to have entered my store," said the storeowner. "You should know that the wholesaler you were dealing with is a well-known crook! Sure, he gave you names of three people who spoke highly of his fabric — but when did they sew their suits? A week ago, or maybe ten days ago! If you had spoken to someone who purchased his fabrics half a year ago, then you would have heard the truth! You would hear how the colors faded and how the material shredded. The suits that were sewn from those fabrics were no longer very impressive looking! "But I, on the other hand," continued the store owner, "will give you names of customers who purchased my fabrics one full year ago and longer! When you hear what they have to say, you will understand just how superior my merchandise truly is." The same idea can be applied to the yetzer hara, said the Dubno Maggid. It tempts man with the meaningless pleasures of this world, and occasionally man may even succumb and lend an ear to his deceitful words. Yet after the moment of indulgence, what is left of these trivial pleasures? Nothing at all! Are they happy with it when they are 60? The advice of the yetzer tov, however, is to occupy oneself with Torah and mitzvos. Someone who is very old is still satisfied with Torah and Mitzvos. This is advice that endures forever and its reward is eternal!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ There was an innkeeper who was accustomed to cooking meals for all other guests. Inevitably she ended up preparing food for all the laborers of the town as well, who flocked to her dining room in order to feast to their hearts' content. She served food that was simple yet satiating, and most importantly, reasonably priced. One day, the innkeeper prepared a large pot of broth. As mealtime drew nearer, she went to check on the food to discern whether or not it was ready to be served.

As she made her way towards the pot, a foul odor filled her nostrils. She quickly ascertained that the ingredients she had used to prepare the broth must have been slightly spoiled, and this was the explanation behind the stench. She was now confronted with a dilemma: Mealtime was rapidly approaching — what would she serve her guests? What could she do? She took fragrant spices and sprinkled them generously into the steamy pot; it was not long before the smell of the spices overpowered the stench. She served the broth to the laborers, and they ate heartily. "This broth is superb!" exclaimed one of the laborers. "It truly smells like Gan Eden!" Sitting next to him was a patron with a sensitive palate who said, "You are mistaken." "The food is completely spoiled; the smell is coming from spices that hide the foul stench..." The yetzer hara, remarked the Dubno Maggid, tries to entice man to sin. The sin, however, emits a putrid odor, and the soul immediately perceives the deception and attempts to flee. But the yetzer hara clothes the wicked deed in a guise of temptation and appeal in order to conceal the foul stench. The more putrid the odor, the more spices the yetzer hara deceitfully adds... A person must arrive at the realization that the "food" is spoiled and that he must push it away with both hands!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A store that sold a wide variety of items opened in the center of the city. Scores of customers entered the store and walked around, feasting their eyes on the shelves crowded with a massive selection of goods. Indeed, business was faring extremely well. Not all of the individuals who visited the store that day had pure intentions. Among the crowd was a sly thief who did not stop strategizing for a moment how he would steal the contents of the cash register. After having observed the storeowner for an extended period, he discovered that at the day's end he would place all of the money in a large bag. This bag was then put into the hands of a trusted messenger who would hurry with the bag to the bank, where it would be placed inside a safe. The thief thought and thought, trying to devise a precise plan, until he finally hit upon an idea. On the road leading from the store to the bank was a shop in which were sold expensive suits, especially to the rich men of the city. Towards evening, the thief entered the suit store and said that he was the servant of a wealthy man who had sent him to purchase a number of suits. "However," added the thief, "my employer does not have the time to come here and have the suits measured to fit him. He therefore sent me, his loyal servant, to perform the task. I must simply find an individual whose dimensions are similar to those of my employer's. If he tries on a suit and it fits, I will be able to purchase it." "Fine," responded the storeowner to the odd request. "Show me an individual whose measurements match those of your employer's, and I will find a suit that fits him." The thief and the owner of the suit store stood in the doorway searching for a suitable candidate to try on the suit. At that point, the thief spotted the messenger — carrying the precious bag filled with money — walking down the street. "His dimensions," said the thief as he pointed to the messenger, "are exactly the same as my employer's." The owner of the suit store approached the messenger and said, "Please sir, perhaps you would be willing to come into my store for a brief moment and try on a suit? it will not take very long at all, and your reward is guaranteed." The messenger agreed and entered the store. There he tried on the expensive suit, and when he stood opposite the mirror to gaze at his reflection, the thief swiped the valuable bag and ran out of the store. "Thief!" screamed the messenger as he set off in hot pursuit. He did not get very far, however, for the owner of the suit store grabbed him and said, "Absolutely not! First take off the suit and only then chase after him!" The messenger removed the suit and made haste — but the thief had already disappeared. We are similar to that messenger, noted the Dubno Maggid. For we have been entrusted with a priceless treasure of Torah and mitzvos that we must bring to Hashem when we stand before Him on the Day of Judgment. The yetzer hara, however, devises various strategies in this attempt to entice us into engaging in meaningless endeavors; it as if he "dresses" us in these foolish pursuits. We are indeed able to pursue him, to fight him, seize him, and retrieve the valuable treasure that he stole from us. In order to do so, however, we must first remove the vile "outfit" in which he has dressed us.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ An individual wished to purchase a home, but the owner absolutely refused to sell. "I will give you an extraordinary amount of money," offered the man. But the owner simply would not hear of it. The man persisted, nonetheless. "Sell me just one room," he said, "and I will pay you handsomely." However, even that offer was rejected. "I'll raise my bid," said the man, "if you will sell me an area in your house where I will be able to hammer just one nail..." Now that offer the owner could not refuse, and in exchange for a huge sum of money, he sold the man the right to hammer one nail into his house. From that day on, however, the owner no longer had any privacy. The man was constantly entering the house seeking to hang various items on the nail. He would then return in order to remove whatever he had hung. There were even occasions when he arrived in the middle of the night in order to reinforce the nail with loud hammering. The owner was ultimately compelled to sell the entire house to the bothersome individual... The way of the yetzer hara, exclaimed R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, is to acquire a seemingly insignificant foothold in a person. Once it has what it wants, however, it rapidly assumes complete control. One must not succumb and grant it even an area to hammer a tiny nail!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In Ropshitz there lived a sanctimonious individual who, in a fit of pious ostentation, decided to go about town wearing the classic garb of the ascetic - sackcloth. The townsfolk used to call him "Leibele the fool." Once this self-styled saint called on Reb Naftali of Ropshitz, and as he approached the door he pulled out a corner of this undergarment here and there. For otherwise, how would the tzaddik see what he was wearing? As soon as Reb Naftali caught sight of him at his door he muttered as if to himself: "No! He's no fool, he's no fool!" Assuming that these words referred to himself, the pious one stepped forward to the tzaddik's table and said: "Rebbe, I see that you too hold that I'm no fool. In that case, why do people call me a fool?" "No, no, my friend," the tzaddik was quick to correct him. "I didn't mean you. I was talking about the Evil Inclination. King Solomon referred to him as 'an old and foolish king,' and I certainly do not regard him as a fool - not if he can fool a man like you into a sack!"

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 198

26. To Employ Sophisticated Strategies Against Temptation

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must employ sophisticated tactics and wisdom in his reverence of Hashem (arum b'yirah), outmaneuvering the insidious cunning of the evil inclination (yetzer hara) — symbolized by the primordial serpent, who was 'more cunning than any beast of the field' (Bereishis 3:1). As King Shlomo advises: 'For with wise strategies you shall wage your war' (Mishlei 24:6). Because destructive impulses ensnare a person through subtle psychological pretexts and gradual rationalizations, one must design proactive, strategic defenses to neutralize the adversary's traps before temptation strikes.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to fight our baser impulses and perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In Acharei Mos, the Sfas Emes places "like the deeds of the land of Egypt — you shall not do" beside "My ordinances you shall perform" (es mishpatai ta'asu) and reads the order as deliberate. Before a person can direct actions toward Torah, he must distance himself from the behavioral patterns and middos that resemble the surrounding unholy environment. This includes Divine service (avodah) against jealousy or zeal (kin'ah), craving and lust (ta'avah), and honor and glory (kavod). Such work does not begin after the giving of Torah; it prepares the heart to receive Torah, as the days of Sefirah prepare Israel for Shavuos. Its taam for strategic warfare is the need to discover and isolate the yetzer's disguised location before fighting it. The preparatory role of Sefirah also matters: the purpose of examining one's middos is to make reception of Torah possible, not to produce endless psychological self-preoccupation (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5642).

• The Sfas Emes discusses the priest's announcement before battle, "Hear O Israel" (Shema Yisrael), and the rabbinic teaching that even the merit of Krias Shema can strengthen Israel in war. Why should a single declaration be so decisive? He explains that after sin, action became vulnerable to the competing force called "the hands of Esav" (yedei Esav), while Torah retains a level of purity that cannot be grasped by that force. The task is therefore not to fight every isolated temptation as a separate battle. Instead one must bind the whole field of action to the single root of Torah. Binding our daily actions to the single root of Torah and Krias Shema protects us from the spiritual snares of the yetzer hara (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5651).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the Midrash about Aharon entering the Holy of Holies through "With wise strategies you shall wage war" as a reference to "bundles of mitzvos" (chavilos shel mitzvos), bundles of commandments. He immediately asks a serious question: does the Mishnah not teach "whether one offers much or offers little, so long as he directs his heart to Heaven"? If abundance alone does not determine the religious value of a deed, why would a larger bundle of mitzvos be the strategy for spiritual success? The Sfas Emes's answer changes the meaning of the metaphor. Just as Aharon entered the Holy of Holies armed with bundles of mitzvos, we outmaneuver the yetzer hara by weaving our individual good deeds into a unified life directed toward Heaven (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5638).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Klausenberger Rebbe once explained his success in the study of Torah in the following way. "In my youth I was considered a bright and diligent student. How did I accomplish this? I tricked my yetzer hara. Other children made great plans at the beginning of the school year for the whole year, and in the end they failed. I said to myself, 'I am going to plan just for today and set goals for this day only.' The Satan, not being interested in a single day, left me alone. The next day I again made plans just for that day, and so on until the end of the year."

The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Judah Lifschitz, Published by Targum Press

27. Never to Succumb to Spiritual Complacency

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-6

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must never succumb to spiritual complacency, presuming that he has permanently conquered his base inclinations. As Hillel cautioned (Pirkei Avos 2:4): 'Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death' — for even Yochanan served as Kohen Gadol for eighty years before succumbing to heresy (Berachos 29a). The evil inclination remains an active, cunning adversary throughout life, constantly seeking to sever man's connection to Hashem through calculated maneuvers. One must remain ever vigilant lest the yetzer hara snare him in its net through material greed or sensual enticements, resembling a hunter who scatters grain to lure an unsuspecting bird into captivity.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to fight our baser impulses and perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Philistines stopped up Avraham's wells, and Yitzchak had to dig them anew. The answer is that the Torah names three Avos because each was capable of opening his own route to Hashem. Every genuine achievement prepares a new spiritual state, but that new state brings a new concealment: after every correction, a new obstruction arises. If Yitzchak had received the earlier path without resistance, he would not have searched for the new avodah of reverent awe (yirah) and strict strength and restraint (gevurah) that belonged to him. As a result, a newly encountered concealment should not be read as evidence that the preceding revelation was illusory; it can be the very opening to another kind of repair (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Toldos 5636).

• He begins from "tov" (a state of blessing) and insists that a person must constantly ascend. Even a righteous individual who has advanced greatly is standing at a new crossroads. The statement "al ta'amin be'atzmecha" does more than warn successful people that they might relapse (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5647)

• The Sfas Emes considers the brothers' fear when they discover money unexpectedly returned to their sacks. If their wishes had truly been given over to Hashem, should those desires not have vanished for good? The Sfas Emes answers that the return of yearning need not prove that the earlier effort was false or wasted. He treats “silver and longing” (kesef) as a remez to inner will (ratzon) or fervent desire (cheishek), and the “grain sack” (amtachas) as the bodily container. The desire returns to the body because hidden holy points remain there and still require spiritual clarification (birur). While every past act of devotion remains eternally preserved on high, the unrefined portion of the body still requires daily vigilance—teaching us never to grow complacent before the yetzer hara and never to grow discouraged in the lifelong work of purification (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Mikeitz 5636).

28. To Resolutely Choose Eternal Life (Uvacharta BaChayim)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-20

As it is written "You shall choose life" (Devarim 30:19 Parshas Nitzavim)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is an active positive commandment to consciously choose the path of holiness and eternal life, as Scripture commands: 'And you shall choose life, so that you and your seed may live' (Devarim 30:19, Parshas Nitzavim). Whenever an individual is confronted with a forbidden temptation or even an unresolved halachic doubt (safek issur) and conscientiously withdraws, he actively fulfills this biblical precept. According to the Sefer Chareidim, the principle that 'a doubt regarding a biblical law requires stringency' (safek d'Oraisa l'chumra) is itself grounded in the Torah's mandate to choose life. In worldly affairs, any prudent traveler naturally chooses the safest path — one clear of traps and peril — even if it requires a longer journey; how much more must a person exercise this vigilance when navigating the eternal pathways of Torah and mitzvos.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to fight our baser impulses and perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes asks why the Torah tells a person “and you shall choose life” (u-vacharta ba-chayim) when it has already presented life and death as two possible paths. Is the command simply saying that the profitable option should be selected? The answer, he explains, is not that the servant should act solely in order to receive payment: Hashem Himself desires the person's life. Choosing life is the fulfillment of the King's beneficent purpose. He develops this from “The blessing: when you hearken” (ha-berachah asher tishme'u) rather than “If you hearken” (im tishme'u). The verse presents blessing far more than as a contingent paycheck after obedience, but as part of the Divine gift embedded in hearing. This is a direct purpose of “and you shall choose life” (u-vacharta ba-chayim), and its distinct mechanism is Divine beneficence preparing human receptivity. When we choose the path of Torah, we align our hearts with the Creator's own loving desire to bestow true life upon His children (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5658).

• The Sfas Emes transmits a teaching from his grandfather on “See, I set before you today” and “and you shall choose life” (u-vacharta ba-chayim). At first sight the command appears to assume that every person already possesses the ability to recognize and select the right path. The interpretation reverses this assumption: Hashem's utterance itself plants the ability within a Jewish soul. His grandfather teaches the power to discriminate and

choose blessing has been set within each Jew. Building on his grandfather's insight, the Sfas Emes teaches that Hashem's command "and you shall choose life" is itself the divine gift that empowers every Jewish soul to choose the good (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5631).

• The Sfas Emes takes the Rosh Hashanah prayer "Remember us for life, inscribe us for life" back to the Torah's "and you shall choose life" (u-vacharta ba-chayim). He argues that the deepest form of life is not mere biological survival. In the creation of Adam, Hashem breathed "the breath of life" (nishmas chayim) into the human being. That Divine breath is the person's highest form of divine life-force (chiyus), whereas the physical body, considered on its own, belongs to a world of mortality. To choose life is to orient the self toward the spiritual vitality that gives the body its lasting meaning. Choosing life means dedicating both our physical health and our spiritual faculties to the divine breath of life (nishmas chayim) within us (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah 5661).

• In the maamar on the Mishkan's voluntary offerings, the Sfas Emes asks where the willingness "whose heart generously moves him" (asher yidvenu libo) originates. What can make the person freely desire what Hashem desires? The answer is that beneath the surface lies an exceptionally powerful inner will (ratzon) of the higher soul (neshamah), a longing for the One who created it. That inner will (ratzon) is not absent; it is hidden by the desires of the body. Torah is the "goodly teaching" (lekach tov) that uncovers it. He notes that Hashem speaks like a father pointing out a beautiful portion to a child. The Mishkan's free offerings illustrate the outcome of this inner discovery: a person gives because an awakened soul wants to give, not only because of an external command (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5661).

• In Acharei Mos, the Sfas Emes explains "which a person shall perform and live by them" against the command to avoid the ways of Egypt and Canaan. He answers that the person must cleave wholly to the light of the mitzvah, investing the whole self until a lasting trace is established within it. A mitzvah performed with coldness and then simply forgotten may disappear without producing such connection. The term is thus given a spiritual meaning: what becomes disconnected or passes away without a durable bond to its source. Here the Sfas Emes contrasts transient, disconnected impulses with the unbroken flow of living water: choosing life (uvacharta ba-chayim) means choosing the path of continuous cleaving (dveikus) that keeps the soul permanently attached to its Divine Fountainhead (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5659).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ The Sages taught in the name of Rabbi Ba bar Zavda: Any internal illness from the lips and gums inward is treated as potentially dangerous to life and is healed immediately even on Shabbos! Once, the great sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was stricken on Shabbos with a severe intestinal colic. His colleagues Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yonatan immediately ruled and instructed that cress-seeds be ground up on Shabbos, mixed into aged wine, and given to him to drink at once so that his life and health would not be endangered!

Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah 2:2 (40d)

29. Not to Test Hashem

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-18

As it says, Do not test Hashem. (6,16 Parshas Va'eschanan)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What does it mean to test Hashem?

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes explicitly recalls the prohibition "You shall not test" (lo sanasu) when examining the failure at Rephidim and the attack of Amalek. His textual question is sharp: if the Torah already prohibited testing Hashem, why should the Midrash connect the fault with remembering Amalek? He explains that the appearance of Amalek makes the spiritual consequences of even a slight withdrawal from service palpable. The real question behind "Is Hashem in our midst or not?" (ha-yeish Hashem be-kirbeinu) is whether Israel will rely on its own visible strength or commit itself to Hashem when the support is not evident. Testing Hashem asks the relationship to submit to immediate verification; emunah proceeds from dependence even when no demonstration is supplied. In this context the most important immediate consequence of the sin is not a private punishment but the opening granted to Amalek, the enemy who targets the moment of weakened attachment (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas Zachor 5648).

• This parallel explains the setting of the prohibition against testing Hashem rather than repeating its precise legal wording. The Sfas Emes asks why Hashem led the departing Israelites by a path above ordinary nature instead of the customary road through the land of the Philistines. His explanation centers on the danger of Amalek: before fully receiving the Torah, Israel could not yet overcome this opponent by the ordinary means of the world. Hashem therefore raised their journey above the natural framework. When Israel asked "Is Hashem in our midst or not?", their doubt weakened that supernatural protection; lifting up the hands in prayer restores elevated action: the hands do not disappear but become vehicles of emunah when they are directed by the voice of Yaakov. This provides the particular role of Shabbos within the argument: stopping ordinary work rehearses the freedom from self-reliance that was temporarily lost at Rephidim (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas Zachor 5647).

• The inverse of the lav stands in Eikev: Hashem afflicted and tested them in the desert. If testing is forbidden, how does Heaven itself test? The Sfas Emes distinguishes the two directions. The desert generation stood under open miracles, and the afflictions of the wilderness were tests with a stated end—"to do you good in your latter end." There is the test of poverty and the test of wealth, and the Sfas Emes notes that the test of wealth is the harder of the two — and that Israel's murmurings in the poverty-test revealed they would not stand whole in the wealth-test of the Land. This implies the lav's rationale: the relationship can bear His testing of us, because He tests in order to give; it cannot bear our testing of Him, because our testing makes His giving conditional. The lav guards the direction of the relationship — that the flow of testing run only from Above to below, never from below to Above (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5659).

2. Is it ever permitted to test Hashem?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a strict negative prohibition to test Hashem, as Scripture states: 'You shall not test Hashem your God, as you tested Him in Massah' (Devarim 6:16, Parshas Va'eschanan). This means that a person must never perform commandments conditionally, demanding: 'I will fulfill these good deeds to see whether God rewards me with prosperity.' The sole exception to this prohibition is the mitzvah of tithing (ma'aser), where Scripture explicitly invites us to test His providence, as the prophet proclaims: Bring all the tithes into the storehouse... and test Me now with this, says Hashem of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you blessing beyond measure' (Malachi 3:10; Ta'anis 9a).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart in this category help to perfect our striving towards perfecting our character and G-dliness. A mitzvah done for reward is ultimately done for somewhat selfish motives. Doing a mitzvah out of love for Hashem is rather another demonstration of selflessness and helps to mold us into more selfless people.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAN

We should not test Hashem and ask for miracles to prove Hashem's existence and power because Hashem has already made so many miracles that demonstrate his existence during the exodus of Mitzrayim and the Jew's sojourn in the desert.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ There was a certain dilapidated, tottering wall in the city of Nehardea that looked ready to collapse at any moment. Whenever the great sages Rav and Shmuel walked along that street, they would take a wide detour and never walk beneath that shaky wall, even though it had remained standing in its place for thirteen years—teaching that a person must never place himself in physical danger and rely on a miracle. One day, the righteous sage Rav Adda bar Ahavah happened to visit Nehardea and walked down that street together with Rav and Shmuel. As they approached the leaning wall, Shmuel said to Rav: 'Let the Master come and walk around it!' Rav replied to him: 'Today we do not need to take the detour, because Rav Adda bar Ahavah is walking with us; his merit is extraordinarily great, and therefore I am not afraid that the wall will fall while he is beneath it!'

Taanis 40:6

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi David Ashear related the following story. Around forty years ago, a wealthy Jewish philanthropist in London suddenly lost his fortune. He didn't tell anyone what had happened because he didn't want those in need to hesitate to approach him for help. He loved giving and didn't want to stop, even after his financial collapse. The man went to a prominent, wealthy Jew in Manchester and requested a loan so he could continue helping people. He explained that he had several investments that would mature in two years, so he asked for a two-year loan of 2 million British pounds, which was roughly equivalent to 4 million dollars. The man from Manchester was prepared to provide the loan but asked if he had a guarantor. The man from London explained that he didn't want anyone to know about his reversal of fortune. He would

need to approach at least ten different people to find a guarantor, so he preferred borrowing without one. "You are asking me to do the impossible," the man from Manchester said. "How can I lend you so much money without a guarantor?" "I am doing this l'shem Shamayim," the man from London explained, "in order to help people. I know Hashem can be the Guarantor." The man from Manchester, with complete faith in Hashem, responded, "You are correct. Because this money is needed l'shem Shamayim, we will name Hashem as the Guarantor." And he gave him the sum he requested. Two years later, the man from London returned to Manchester without the money. He explained that he did not yet have the funds to repay the loan and needed another two months. The man from Manchester began to think he would never see the money again, so he went into his private room and spoke to Hashem. "You are the Guarantor for this loan," he said, "and the time has come for it to be repaid. But I don't want the money. I have a daughter who is already of age and has not been able to find a shidduch. Please send her a husband, and I will consider that as payment of the loan." The man's daughter was engaged less than three weeks later. He also closed a profitable business deal that yielded almost the complete sum he had lent. Two-and-a-half months later, the man from London returned, ready to repay the loan. But the lender refused, explaining that the "Guarantor" had already repaid the debt in full, and the man did not owe him anything. However, the man from London insisted, saying that he didn't accept free gifts and was intent on repaying the money he borrowed. An argument ensued, with each party insisting that the other keep the money. Remarkably, they brought the case to a beis din in Israel. One of the judges who presided over the case, Rabbi Zickerman, who later related this story, said that the judges were all in tears, overcome by emotion at seeing the honesty and sincerity of these two men. They ruled that the money should be returned to the "Guarantor," to Hashem. It happened to be a shemittah year, so the money was given to a special fund set up to assist farmers in Israel who observed shemittah.

Table Talk, Edition 402 (Parshas Vaeschanan), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

30. To Behold Earthly Kings to Appreciate Hashem's Glory

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-17

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

It is a praiseworthy religious duty to exert oneself to go out and witness the majesty of an earthly monarch — even a non-Jewish king — reciting the prescribed blessing upon seeing him. As our Sages taught (Berachos 58a): 'A person should always strive to run toward the kings of Israel, and not only toward the kings of Israel, but even toward the kings of the nations of the world; so that if he merits in the Future Era, he will distinguish between the royal glory of Israel and the glory of the nations.' Beholding the impressive splendor, awe, and pageantry of earthly monarchs allows mortal man to intuitively appreciate the infinitely superior glory, radiance, and majesty that Hashem will bestow upon the righteous in the World to Come (Olam HaBa).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart help us to strive towards perfecting our character and become more Godly. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In his 5662 discourse on Parshas Va'era, the Sfas Emes reflects on the Midrashic reading of "See, I have made you a master over Pharaoh" alongside the Torah's command to accord honor to kings (chalok kavod l'malchus) and the rabbinic blessing recited upon beholding a monarch. Why did Hashem ordain that even mortal rulers in this transient world be surrounded with majesty, retinues, and visible honor? The Sfas Emes explains that earthly sovereignty exists solely as a tangible pedagogical mirror (mashal) in the lower world, training human eyes and hearts to appreciate what it means to stand in trembling awe before the supreme King of Kings in the World to Come (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Va'eira 5662).

• In this striking treatment of "Go forth for yourself" (Lech Lecha), the Sfas Emes portrays Avraham as reluctant to separate from the other nations because he cared about their welfare. Hashem nevertheless directed him to become distinct, precisely because Avraham's election could ultimately benefit the whole world. This introduces the principle that contrast has spiritual value: a righteous person becomes more recognizable against a surrounding world that has not yet achieved the same holiness, just as light is seen against darkness. The Sfas Emes expressly quotes Chazal's instruction that one should run to see even the kings of the nations so that, if privileged, one can later distinguish the difference between kings. A person's encounter with material power, attraction, and worldly distinction can sharpen his appreciation of what it means to serve Hashem without collapsing everything into the same value. That is an educational consequence of the instruction to encounter royal pomp, not a license to seek out distractions for their own sake (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Lech Lecha 5641).

• The Sfas Emes quotes the Gemara's instruction to run to see a king, even a non-Jewish king, so that one might eventually discern the difference between kings. Instead of treating this as mere curiosity about royal pomp, he interprets the encounter as an educational passage from human authority to the sovereignty of Heaven (malchus Shamayim). The Torah's appointment of a king is paradoxical. Had the people truly feared Hashem, they would not need someone else's rule to restrain them. Yet once they recognize their spiritual deficiency, accepting an earthly king can become a mitzvah precisely because it trains the emotions toward reverence. Beholding the majesty of an earthly monarch trains our human senses to bow in humble awe before the supreme sovereignty of the King of Kings (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5664).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Shimon Sofer was the Rav in a town in Hungary. The Hungarian emperor planned a visit to the town. Rav Sofer planned to say the berachah on the king. He wrote the berachah in a piece of paper in order to say it properly, which is the halachah if it is not a berachah that you are familiar with. When he approached the king and began saying the berachah, he was so nervous, that he dropped the paper. He said the berachah by heart. That night in shul by Maariv, Rav Sofer began crying. He was asked why he was crying. Rav Sofer said I am crying because I did not drop my siddur. I dropped the paper speaking to a human king, why didn't I drop my siddur when speaking to Hashem.

Heard from Rav Halpern

31. To Contemplate Three Truths to Avoid Sin

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-18

SEFER CHAREIDIM

To shield oneself from committing a transgression, a person should continuously contemplate three fundamental truths concerning his mortal existence, as taught by Akavya ben Mahalalel (Pirkei Avos 3:1): 'Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: know whence you came, whither you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give a strict judgment and accounting. Whence you came — from a putrid drop; whither you are going — to a place of dust, worms, and decay; and before Whom you are destined to give judgment and accounting — before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.' Complementing this, one must meditate upon the three divine perceptions that surround him (Pirkei Avos 2:1): 'Know what is above you: an Eye that sees, an Ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in the Book.'

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

All of the mitzvos of the heart help us to strive towards perfecting our character and become more Godly. This mitzvah helps to motivate us to fight our baser impulses and perfect our character through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes begins with Akavya ben Mahalalel's instruction to consider three things so that one will not come to sin. He raises a difficulty that is easily overlooked: why tell a person he came from a foul drop when every Jew says each morning that the soul Hashem gave him is pure? The answer depends on distinguishing the body's independent claims from the source of the life flowing through it. Acknowledging the body's humble physical origin is not a denial of the soul's greatness. On the contrary, it removes the illusion that the body possesses life from itself and thereby makes a person capable of recognizing the soul's Divine origin. This insight turns the Mishnah's seemingly negative reminders into a positive recovery of the soul's real dignity. It is especially important not to flatten the distinction between the lowliness of the body and the sacredness of the life that Hashem continuously gives it (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5631).

• This passage adds a much-needed qualification to teachings about contemplating human frailty. The Sfas Emes cites his grandfather's interpretation of Yaakov's question to the messengers, “To whom do you belong, where are you going, and whose are these before you?” (le-mi atah ve-anah seileich u-le-mi eileh lefanecha). The yetzer hara can also ask the familiar questions of the Mishnah—where did you come from and where are you going—but turn them into instruments of sadness and discouragement. The fact that a question resembles an ethical teaching does not guarantee it is being used in the service of truth. Its spiritual effect depends on what happens next. The distinction is psychologically important: the proper use of the Mishnah moves the person to avodah, while the yetzer weaponizes identical questions to argue that further avodah is futile (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5635).

• Discussing tzitzis, the Sfas Emes quotes the commentators' explanation that fringes at the garment's edge recall the end of a person's life. He places this teaching alongside Akavya ben Mahalalel's instruction to contemplate one's origin and destination. A superficial reading could lead one to think that the contemplation only lowers a person's self-image: the body originates in physical matter, eventually dies, and therefore deserves little trust. The Sfas Emes introduces a more positive interpretation. The soul too belongs to the instruction "know from where you came" (me-ayin basa), for its origin is from Above; and the soul's future return to its source also belongs to "and whither you are going" (u-le'an atah holeich). Remembering where both dimensions come from allows physical restraint to serve the soul's restoration. The apparent tension between physical humiliation and spiritual dignity is intentionally left visible: only recognition of the body as dependent allows its holy function to emerge (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5643).

• The Sfas Emes returns to Akavya's three contemplations through the verse "Every person shall revere his mother and his father, and My Sabbaths you shall guard" (ish imo ve-aviv tira'u ve-es Shabbsosai tishmoru). He proposes a precise correspondence between the three statements in the Mishnah and the three partners in a human being. "Know from where you came" (me-ayin basa) points to the father's contribution; "and whither you are going" (u-le'an atah holeich) is associated with the mother's contribution and the mortality of bodily existence; and "before Whom you are destined to give an accounting and a reckoning" (ve-lifnei Mi atah asid litein din ve-cheshbon) directs the person to the Creator, whose gift makes the whole human being live. Recognizing that dependence changes the motive for moral restraint from mere fear to a dignified desire to complete one's account of good deeds. The father-mother-Creator structure is not an allegory merely of physical birth; he deliberately reapplies all three stages to preparation and completion of a single good deed (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5637).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ They said of Elazar ben Durdaya that he had sunk deeply into a life of sin, traveling even across seven rivers in pursuit of transgression. At a moment of awakening, a remark pierced his heart: 'Elazar ben Durdaya will never be accepted in repentance!' Shaken to the core, he went out and sat between two mountains and hills and cried out: 'O mountains and hills, beg for mercy for me!' They replied: 'Before we beg for mercy for you, we must beg for mercy for ourselves, for it is written: The mountains shall depart and the hills be moved!' He cried out to heaven and earth, and to the sun, moon, and stars, and each answered that they must pray for themselves. Finally he declared: 'The matter depends upon none other than me!' (Ein ha-davar talui ela bi). He placed his head between his knees and wept in wholehearted repentance until his soul departed in purity. A Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed: 'Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is invited to the life of the World to Come!' Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi wept and said: 'Not only are penitents accepted in Heaven, they are even called Rabbi!'

Avodah Zarah 17a

❖ Originally, whoever wished to clear the ashes from the Altar at dawn would immerse and race up the Altar ramp; whoever reached within four cubits of the top first won the privilege. An incident occurred when two Kohanim were running neck-and-neck up the ramp, and one pushed his fellow, who fell and broke his leg; when the Court saw that they were coming into danger, they ordained that the Altar service would be assigned only by a peaceful lottery (payis). A second tragic incident occurred where one young Kohen's zeal turned to violence on the ramp, and the Sages cried out over how far competitive zeal without fear of Heaven had fallen—teaching that the purity of human life is far more precious than even the vessels of the Sanctuary.

Mishnah, Yoma 2:2

❖ It once happened that Rabban Gamliel and the Elders were reclining together in Jericho, the City of Palms, and they brought fresh dates before them and ate them. Whereas Rabban Gamliel held the minority opinion that one recites the full three-blessing Birkas HaMazon even after dates, the Sages held that one recites the abridged one-blessing summary of three (Brachah Achas Me'ein Shalosh — Al HaEitz). When Rabban Gamliel gave Rabbi Akiva permission to lead the after-blessing, Rabbi Akiva quickly recited the one-blessing summary according to the Sages! Rabban Gamliel said to him: 'Akiva! Why do you poke your head into disputes?' Rabbi Akiva answered respectfully: 'You yourself taught us, our Master: Follow the majority (Acharei rabbim lehatot — Shemos 23:2)! Even though you rule one way and your colleagues rule another way, the halachah follows the words of the majority!'

Tosefta, Berachos 4:12

❖ An incident occurred involving a pious man to whom the people said during a drought: 'Pray that rain may fall!' He prayed, and abundant rains fell. When the rain continued pouring down, they came back to him and said: 'Just as you prayed and the rains fell, so too pray now that they go away!' He replied to them: 'Go out and see if a man can stand on the high corner of Mount Ofel and splash his feet in the rainwater—so long as the world is not being destroyed by flood, we have received a tradition that one does not pray for an abundance of good blessing to depart!'

Tosefta, Taanis 2:13 (Lieberman ed.)

❖ R' Avin once constructed gates for the beis midrash in Teveriah. He pointed them out to R' Manna, who said (Hoshea 8:14), '"And Israel forgot His creator and he built temples". Why do you not give the money to poor people who study Torah?

Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim 5:4

❖ Once, the sons of Rabban Gamliel returned home late at night from a wedding feast after midnight. They said to their father, 'We have not yet recited the evening Shema.' Rabban Gamliel answered them, 'If the light of dawn has not yet risen, you are still obligated to recite it.' The Mishnah explains that this principle applies not only to the evening Shema: wherever the Sages set 'until midnight' as the deadline for a mitzvah—such as burning the fats and limbs of sacrifices on the Altar or eating offerings that may be eaten for one day and night—their Biblical obligation actually remains in force until dawn. Why, then, did the Sages declare 'until midnight'? In order to distance a person from transgression, ensuring that no one delays until dawn and accidentally misses the mitzvah altogether.

Mishnah, Berachos 1:1

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In the Skolye Beis Midrash in Williamsburg, an unusual custom was practiced every year on the eve of Yom Kippur. As the Holy Day was ushered in, the prayers began not with Kol Nidrei, but with the congregation declaring in unison: Shema Yisrael! Before that declaration, the Skolye Rebbe would face the open Aron HaKodesh and quote the above comment of Rashi. He would then explain it with a parable: A king had an only son whom he taught great wisdom and who was provided with his every desire. The son became friendly with wicked people and began to stray from the proper path. The king sent emissaries to try to convince the prince to mend his ways, but to no avail. Finally, the king was forced to banish his son to exile in a far-off province. Before sending his son away, the king gave him a large amount of money and other items of value so that he could have whatever he needed even while in exile. But the prince squandered everything away. Left with nothing and living a life of degradation, the prince finally was ready to repent. Meanwhile, the king missed his son terribly and yearned for him to return to the palace. But first, he had to be sure that the prince was ready and willing to make a new start. The king decided to travel throughout his empire, and invite his every subject to have an audience with him and put forth one request. Surely, reasoned the king, his son would hurry to see him. Then, the king would be able to judge whether or not the prince was ready to return home. The day finally came when the king arrived at the far-off

province where the prince lived. But the prince did not come forward because he had forgotten the language of the king and would not be able to communicate with him. The prince wept over his sad plight until a wise man told him, "You are mistaken. You do not need to know the language of the king. Your father has embarked on this long journey for the sole purpose of being reunited with you. Simply walk up to the throne and cry out, 'Father, Father!' and he will take you into his arms." The king alludes to Hashem, while the prince alludes to the Jewish people. Hashem taught His people the Torah, the greatest of all wisdoms. The Jews fell from their previous status of holiness and purity, and Hashem sent prophets to steer them back to the proper path. But the prophets' warnings went unheeded and the Jews were sent into exile. There, among the gentile nations, the Jews fell yet further. After all the sufferings the Jews have endured in exile, they find it difficult to express themselves in the language of the King of kings. In a sense, they have forgotten how to communicate with Him. But they still remain His beloved nation. When a Jew declares his belief in Hashem daily by reciting Shema Yisrael... he is, in a sense, crying out "Father!" This declaration, says Rashi, was enough to gain the Jews merit to be victorious in war. And it is enough to arouse Hashem's compassion in the darkness of exile.

Shabbos Stories, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ It was Yom Kippur, just after Kol Nidrei, but it wasn't just any Yom Kippur. It was the second to last Yom Kippur of the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin's life. He was already very ill. The talmidim did not know just how advanced his illness was, but they knew that his condition was life-threatening. It was during the break between Kol Nidrei and Maariv when Dov decided to approach the Rosh Yeshivah to ask for a berachah. The Rosh Yeshivah looked like an angel to him, wearing his kittel, the seriousness of the day etched on his face. The Rosh Yeshivah was happy to accommodate and gave Dov a heartfelt berachah. He then took Dov completely by surprise by uncharacteristically asking, "Now please give me a berachah." Initially, Dov was caught off guard. He, a mere talmid, should give his Rosh Yeshivah a berachah? When he found his voice, he gave a most heartfelt berachah for a refuah sheleimah, nachas from his children, from his talmidim, from the yeshivah, and that the talmidim should continue to shteig. The Rosh Yeshivah answered amen and then embellished his request. "Firstly," he said, "please give me a berachah that I should have nachas from you... and secondly, please give me a berachah that I should have a geshmak (enjoyment) in learning!" "That completely took me by surprise!" Dov recalls. "Here is a Rosh Yeshivah who has been leading a yeshivah for thirty years, giving daily shiurim, imbuing thousands of talmidim with a geshmak in learning, and now he is dangerously ill. Nevertheless, the only thing on his mind after Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur is that he needs a berachah for a geshmak in learning. His love of Torah was incalculable!"

From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ When Rav Eisenman established a yeshivah in Kishinev after the fall of Communism, he housed it inside a particular historic shul. Why there? During the Holocaust, the Jews of that neighborhood had been rounded up to be executed. At the last moment, one Jew begged the commander for permission to enter the shul one final time to bid farewell to Hashem. Inside that sanctuary, the Jews poured out their hearts in tearful parting prayers before giving up their lives al kiddush Hashem. Rav Eisenman recalled a parallel teaching of the Chofetz Chaim, who once heard a drafted Cantonist soldier weeping inside a house on Erev Rosh Hashanah because he could no longer read the machzor; fifty years later, that very house became a thriving yeshivah, for tears shed for Torah and Hashem are seeds that never go to waste. So too, fifty years after the martyrs of Kishinev wept in that shul, their tears blossomed into a vibrant beis medrash echoing once again with the sound of Torah.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 63

❖ Bitterly unhappy, a woman once came to Reb Aryeh Levin's home. "Let me sit in your house," she pleaded, "and cry and weep before you." "You may surely sit," he replied, "and even cry and weep — but not before me. Direct your tears to the Holy, Blessed One who listens to weeping and hears the outcries of His human beings." Taking a seat, the woman simply began a lament without end, unable to stop. In between her tears she managed to sob out her story of woe, about her

husband who was mortally sick. "Do not cry so," said Reb Aryeh. "The Holy, Blessed One will surely have mercy and grant a cure." But alas, a few days later the woman returned to tell him that her husband had passed away. And she wept anew with bitter tears. Reb Aryeh did his best to comfort her, seeking words that would touch her heart. Finally, with some spirit she answered, "Look: I will accept your solace and stop my lament — but only if you tell me what became of the thousands of tears I shed over the Tehillim, the Book of Psalms, when I said its words of prayer to the Master of the world, imploring Him to cure my husband when he lay ill. It Was all for nothing, wasn't it?" "I will tell you," said Reb Aryeh gently, "When your life on earth ends and you come before the court of justice in heaven, you will find out how many severe and harsh decrees against the Jewish people were torn up, made null and void, because of those precious holy tears you shed for your husband. Not one teardrop goes to waste. The Holy, Blessed one counts them like pearls, and treasures them." At that the woman burst into weeping again, but now with tears of happiness (that all her suffering and prayer were truly not in vain), Sometime later she came back: "Tell me again, dear rabbi, those beautiful words: What happened with those tears of mine that I wept?"

A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim

❖ The Baal Shem Tov related that a very harsh heavenly decree had been issued, which many tzaddikim were unable to overturn, even with their most fervent prayers. "What we were unable to do, " the Baal Shem Tov said, "was accomplished by a pious woman, who, upon hearing the tearful prayers of the congregation, addressed G-d: 'Master of the Universe! How can You not accept the supplications of Your children? I am only a human being, and my mercies are limited. Yet when any of my children cry, it breaks my heart, and I would do anything to stop their tears. But You are infinite and Your mercies are infinite. Listen how all Your children are crying. Surely You do not have a heart of stone. You must help them and relieve their suffering!' "It was this simple but fervent prayer that caused G-d to annul the harsh decree. "

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky was the Rosh Yeshivah of Ner Yisrael. Rav Kulefsky's methods were far from conventional, and his sense of humor shone through in his interactions with his children. One morning, he walked into his son's room holding a newspaper and exclaimed, "Oh, my! Mickey Mantle [a famous baseball player for the Yankees] died!" His son jumped out of bed in shock, only to find out that Mickey Mantle was actually very much alive. Rav Kulefsky smirked and said, "Okay, now that you're out of bed, you can go to minyan." During a time when his eyesight was severely compromised, Rav Kulefsky attended a bar mitzvah where someone passed him the serving plate. Because his vision was so impaired, he mistook it for his personal plate and started eating straight from the platter. When someone pointed out the mix-up, he immediately stopped. Instead of becoming upset or embarrassed, he chuckled. Later that night, Rav Kulefsky shared the story with his family, saying, "You have to hear this -- the funniest thing happened to me today." This was more than just an amusing anecdote; he was using his remarkable sense of humor to keep himself from becoming disheartened by his difficult circumstances.

From Rav Kulefsky, by Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ We are very blessed that TableTalk's readership covers the entire spectrum of G-d fearing Jews. From those that are completely observant and talmidei chachamim to those who are not completely observant. Last week, I shared a Parshah thought that highlighted the power of a prayer from a simple Jew who prays to Hashem out of total helplessness knowing that only He can answer. After receiving last week's TableTalk, Yelena and Yefim, a family with whom I am very close, sent me an email reflecting their reaction to last week's Parshah thought. Yelana grew up in the city of Kharkov, Ukraine. Although this was a very Jewish city, there were no observant Jews. All of her grandparents spoke Yiddish. For most of them it was their mother tongue, even before Russian. This demographic was the result of the Communists anti-religion campaign. Given this background you will appreciate the import of Yelena's response. Yelena wrote the following. "I really enjoyed reading this week's Table Talk. You are doing a great job writing them. Thank you! Your remarks about the huge

force that a traveler's prayer could have, reminded me of my own story. Many years ago when I was 15 or 16 years old my dad was hospitalized with a massive heart attack. The doctors told my mom that they give a 5% chance for my dad to survive that massive heart attack. There was nothing else that I was able to do. Outside the hospital there was a forest. I wandered in the forest around that hospital crying and praying to G-d to save my dad. Not only did my dad survive but he lived another 31 more years after that! I never fully appreciated how much such strength was in my prayer." Evidently, no matter who the traveler is, young or old, observant or otherwise, when a Jew counts on Him, He answers.

Table Talk, Edition 235 (Parshas Behaloscha), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ In the early stages of the war, the Brisker Rav fled together with most of his family from Warsaw to Vilna. For three days, their traveling party was in great danger. The Brisker Rav took upon himself to follow the advice of his ancestor Rav Chaim of Volozhin in Nefesh HaChaim (3:12). Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that one should reflect constantly on the verse, "Ein od milevado (there is none besides Him)," in times of danger. No matter what was going on around them, the Brisker Rav thought only about this verse and its implications. When it came time for Minchah, the Brisker Rav asked that the wagons stop so that he could daven properly, as it was difficult for him to concentrate in a moving wagon. His fellow passengers, however, were up-in-arms over the idea of delaying their journey in light of the danger in which they found themselves. The Rav announced that he had no objections if they continued but for his part, he would daven where he was, and follow after the party later. Out of respect for him, his fellow passengers agreed to wait. When they reached the next city on their journey, they found the streets empty of Jews. The streets were swarming with German soldiers, and it was only through a miracle that they didn't notice the Brisker Rav's wagons. A gentile woman called out to the Brisker Rav's party to flee the city immediately because the Germans had already gathered the city's Jews and taken them away. The Brisker Rav's fellow passengers all expressed their amazement at the Rav's ruach ha-kodesh. But the Rav dismissed the suggestion that anything extraordinary had taken place. "What I did was perfectly logical," he said. "I asked myself: What reason is there to hurry? There we will be in danger, and here we are in danger; If so, there is no reason not to daven properly. Anyone who acts according to the halachah merits the fulfillment of the words of the Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 4:5), 'No man who listens to Me will lose because of it."

In Their Shadow, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The Brisker Rav usually took a T.W.A. flight back to Eretz Yisrael that stopped in Athens, Greece. On one of these stopovers, the plane needed to make an additional stop in Rome, Italy. It was time for Minchah, and The Brisker Rav looked around for a place where he could daven without distractions. One of the passengers on the flight was a Jew who knew the terminal well from previous trips, and he pointed out a side room where The Brisker Rav would have the privacy he needed. The Brisker Rav entered the room, but surprisingly, he walked out immediately and found a different place to daven. The man who had suggested the room as an appropriate place was curious to know what had been wrong with it; He went in to examine it and found it empty of people and perfectly suitable. Why had the Brisker Rav not wished to daven there? He looked around some more and finally saw the image of a cross hidden between two pieces of furniture. It was clear that The Brisker Rav could not have seen the cross, but his pure heart had sensed there was something wrong in the room, and that it was not a proper place to daven." The Brisker Rav was still standing in prayer when the time came to get back on the plane. The captain and the crew were already in their places. The Brisker Rav's traveling companions were at a loss — what should they do now? All their luggage was in the plane's baggage compartment; what would they do if the plane would leave them and The Brisker Rav at the airport? The crew had no understanding of the laws of Jewish prayer and explanations were to no avail. It was time to take off. At that point help arrived from an unexpected source. Among the passengers was a priest, who approached the crew and told them that this was a holy man, and they should wait for him rather than disturb his prayers. They could not refuse the priest's request, and the crew and passengers waited patiently while the Jewish rabbi completed his prayers. Only then did the plane continue on its way to the Holy Land."

The Brisker Rav Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 472

❖ During the late 1700's the Russian authorities followed the orders of the Czar to enter towns and grab a certain quota of children to become "cantonists," soldiers in the army of the Czar. The scene was terribly heartrending as young children, some only 5 or 6 years old, were ripped away from their mothers' arms and taken away in wagons, never to see their parents again. The children were brought to an undisclosed location in the frozen tundra of Siberia. In most cases, within a few short months, they had forgotten nearly everything from their previous lives. The Russian officers brainwashed them into believing that the Czar was their father and that he would provide them with all they needed. During the first few weeks after his abduction, little Naftali, a 5-year-old boy, was very quiet and withdrawn. The memory of his mother's anguish as he was ripped away from her arms had left an indelible impression on his soul. But over the next few months, his emotions became as cold as the weather outside. The boys gathered together every night in their quarters when they were ready to go to sleep. A 7-year-old named Binyamin became the leader of the younger boys. He tried to remember everything his rebbi had taught him, and repeated what he could to his younger friends. Before they had left, the boys had been learning together in cheder about the upcoming Yamim Tovim. Their rebbi had taught them about the importance of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He had told them how Hashem accepts our tefillos as long as they come from the heart. One night, Binyamin sat down with the boys and told them that night was Rosh Hashanah. He spoke to them about the importance of the day and how it was the time when everything was decided for the coming year. There was some soft crying in the room as many of the boys became homesick, perhaps remembering what it was like to be home, with their loving parents, getting ready for Yom Tov. Finally, as Binyamin finished his "derashah," he asked if anyone in the room remembered the tefillos, for he could not remember the words himself. When there was no response, he asked if one of the boys remembered any of the words of Tehillim by heart. Suddenly, Naftali began to speak. "I don't remember any of the words of Tehillim, but I do remember this." Slowly, softly, he began to sing the tune used for the chanting of Tehillim. As he walked to the front of the room, he sang, "Na na na na na nu na na na na na na na na And the rest of the children, who also knew this tune, sang along with him. As these little angels "davened," they were not constrained by their lack of words. The stirring melody took them higher and higher. Tears flowed as the boys continued to sing, with little Naftali as the chazzan and the rest of the children as his tzibbur. A short time later, somehow, word of this incident became known and reached the ears of the great guardian and advocate for Klal Yisrael, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. When he heard the story, he, too, began to cry. He then revealed that he had been granted a vision of a terrible tragedy that had been decreed upon the Jewish people. A great fire came, and no matter how hard he tried, he could not extinguish the flames. Suddenly, a powerful stream appeared. The fire raged until it reached the stream. And then, suddenly, it was extinguished. "That stream was formed from the tears of those children. They accomplished what no one else could." As lost as they were, with no hope in sight, they had found a glimmering spark. And that spark unleashed a river of tears, which, according to Rav Levi Yitzchak, caused the terrible decree to be annulled. A Yid is never really lost.

Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Since the laws of the Torah were the foundation stone of the Brisker Rav's life, nothing in the world could move him the slightest degree from what he saw as his mission. His entire system of decision-making revolved around this one central point that a man stands commanded every moment of his life. Beyond this, anything going on in the world around him was simply an external condition that meant nothing. All circumstances served only as tools for the observance of mitzvos. During World War II, The Brisker Rav and his son, R. Yosef Dov, were fleeing from the war zone in the direction of Vilna. They came to a border crossing that was open for only one hour a day. They waited there for hours, until late afternoon, when Minchah time came around. "I cannot daven properly in this place," The Brisker Rav announced. Those present tried to convince him that he should daven there anyway, saying that if he left the spot for even a few minutes, he might miss his chance, and who knows — it being wartime whether there would be another. But The Brisker Rav stood firm, staunch in his opinion — which he stated dozens of times in similar situations in his life — that one never loses by performing a mitzvah properly, and therefore he headed back to a nearby village where he would be able to daven with proper concentration. As it were, the fears of the people there turned out to be valid. When he returned to the border crossing, he discovered that the

gate had opened in their absence and had then closed again. But then, strangely enough, the border guards opened the gate again especially for The Brisker Rav, upon the request of a number of people who had begged them to break their normal routine and let The Brisker Rav and his son through.

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 436

❖ Once, Rav Avigdor Miller was walking with someone down the street. They passed a drunken man sleeping on the sidewalk, with his head on the hard pavement. When Rav Miller saw the man, he quickly found some rolled up newspapers and put them under the man's head like a pillow. Rav Miller then explained his behavior to the person with him. "He is a Tzelem Elokim (created in G-d's image)." Similarly, a grandson once asked Rabbi Miller how he could tolerate living on Ocean Parkway, with emergency vehicles always driving by, their sirens blaring and lights flashing. Rav Miller replied, "To the contrary, these 'disturbances' are really a great opportunity. Each time an ambulance drives by, I say a small tefillah for the ill person inside it. I even trained myself to do it during my sleep."

From Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and Revolution, By Yaakov Y. Hamburger, Published by Judaica Press

❖ Rav Yisrael Klopholtz recounts that when he was a young boy, he worked in a factory that had two managers. One was Jewish, while the second was not. Sadly, the Jewish manager was against religion. He therefore made life very difficult for the religious workers who wanted to keep their religious practices. Friday afternoons and Yomim Tovim were especially difficult. The non-Jew, on the other hand, was very accommodating and allowed them to leave early on Fridays and right before the holidays. Once, before Rav Yisrael went on vacation, the non-Jewish manager asked him where he was going. Rav Yisrael responded, "I am going to the city of Radin." Many people knew of the great and holy Chofetz Chaim, who lived in Radin. When the non-Jew heard that Rav Yisrael was going there, he asked Rav Yisrael to request a blessing from the Chofetz Chaim for children. The non-Jewish manager did not yet have children. "I arrived on Friday afternoon in Radin and was planning to stay there through Shabbos. There was not much time, so I immediately made my way to see the Chofetz Chaim. During the conversation, I mentioned the non-Jewish manager's request. When the Chofetz Chaim heard that the non-Jew was helping me keep my religious practices, he was deeply moved. He specifically said that he would daven for him. He repeated that I should inform the non-Jewish manager that the Chofetz Chaim felt obligated to daven for him because of his just ways. "On Sunday, when I was preparing to leave, I returned to the Chofetz Chaim to say goodbye. This time, the Chofetz Chaim himself brought up the request of the non-Jew. He again reminded me not to forget to tell the non-Jew that he would daven for him. "Within the year, the non-Jewish couple was blessed with a child."

From Experience Greatness By Rabbi Moshe Hubner

❖ It was the Erev Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah. R' Shlomo Friedman took his eight-year-old daughter, Hadassah, to visit the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, in North Plainfield for a berachah. At the time, the Rosh Yeshivah was already battling serious illness, but almost never indicated to his talmidim that he was not feeling well. R' Elya Meir greeted his talmid warmly. "And how is the Rosh Yeshivah doing?" R' Shlomo asked. With his trademark smile, the Rosh Yeshivah exclaimed, "Haflei va'fele!" (lit, wonder of wonders, i.e, incredible!). When R' Shlomo then asked if the Rosh Yeshivah would be davening at the amud, R' Elya Meir answered in the affirmative. So far, the conversation was progressing exactly as R' Shlomo would have expected with the Rosh Yeshivah acting as if he were robust and healthy, without giving any indication that he was sick or weak in any way. Then suddenly, the conversation changed, leaving R' Shlomo with a lifelong lesson. The Rosh Yeshivah bent his head toward young Hadassah Friedman and asked her, "What is your name?" "Hadassah," she replied shyly. "And how old are you?" "Eight." "Do you know which Yom Tov is coming?" "Rosh Hashanah," she answered. "You know, Hadassah," the Rosh Yeshivah began to explain to the child, on her level, what Rosh Hashanah is all about, "on Rosh Hashanah, everything will be decided. Rosh Hashanah is the Yom HaDin. On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem decides whether someone will be healthy or sick, strong or weak, whether he will earn a living... That is why tefillah, davening, is so important on Rosh Hashanah. "Do you know," the Rosh Yeshivah continued, "how valuable your tefillos are on Rosh

Hashanah? Let me tell you how valuable they are. You know, Hadassah, when I daven, when your father davens, or even when the Gadol Hador davens on Rosh Hashanah, their tefillos are not as special as the tefillos that YOU daven to Him. Yes, Hashem loves and values your tefillos, and the tefillos of all Yiddishe kinderlach, even more than the tefillos of the Gadol Hador." Looking her in the eye, the Rosh Yeshivah then said, "Can I ask you for a favor? I need a refuah sheleimah. My name is Eliyohu Meir ben Rochel. Can you daven for me for a refuah sheleimah? I am asking you because I know that your tefillos are the best tefillos that I can possibly get!" Picture the scene: A Rosh Yeshivah of hundreds of talmidim, a Rosh Yeshivah who is ill and weak, but never gives his talmidim an inkling of his ill health. A Rosh Yeshivah who only minutes earlier had enthusiastically proclaimed that he was "Haflei va'fele!" And now, this same Rosh Yeshivah was giving an eight-year-old girl a shiur that is the chinuch of a lifetime, ending off by asking her to daven for him! "I was totally floored," exclaimed R' Shlomo. "I want to tell you just how real, just how potent that shiur was! It was nearly three years later when the Rosh Yeshivah took a terrible turn for the worse. After hearing the news, I came home and told my wife, 'The Rosh Yeshivah is not doing well.' Suddenly, my daughter (who was already ten) piped up, 'You mean Eliyohu Meir ben Rochel?' "'Yes,' I replied, 'how do you know his name?' "'What do you mean?' she asked in surprise. 'I daven for him every day just like he asked me to!' That was the impact made by his shiur in tefillah, a shiur given with the utmost sincerity to an eight-year-old girl. Almost three years later, and she was still davening for him every single day!"

From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, by Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah (Table Talk, Edition 409, Parshas Haazinu, by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner)

❖ A student of Rav Dovid Trenk had permission to bring his car to yeshivah, but it broke down on Route 9, not far from the yeshivah. He trekked to the nearest pay-phone and called Rabbi Trenk, who arranged for a tow truck to pull the car to a garage. Then Rabbi Trenk came by and sat with the bachur, waiting for the tow truck to arrive. Lots of time passed, and the talmid said, "Rebbi is so busy and I am fine waiting here by myself. Rebbi can go." "I know that I can go," Rabbi Trenk replied, "but if it was my own son stuck out here, I would wait with him—and you are my own son!" On another occasion, there was a talmid who consistently missed Shacharis—he simply never came. One day, however, he got out of bed and made his way to the beis medrash, arriving as the minyan was starting Aleinu, the very last part of davening. He sauntered to his seat and slowly started to remove his tefillin from the bag in order to put them on... "You made it," a beaming Rabbi Trenk ran up the aisle to greet him, "you made it, I'm so proud. You came to say Aleinu with us... you came to say Aleinu with us, that's wonderful!"

From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ R' Leibush was the gabai of the Sfas Emes. He wanted to stop because it was an exhausting job, but the Sfas Emes asked him to continue. There was a long line. A rich man named Chaim Grossman came to speak to the Sfas Emes. He said he will give a tremendous donation to Ger institutions if he can skip the line. R' Leibush said that was against the rules. R' Chaim waited for 5 hours. Finally when it was about to be his turn an emergency meeting had to be made with the rebbe because a young girl was having an emergency surgery. R' Chaim protested but R' Leibush said that takes priority. R' Chaim was so humiliated and mad that he punched R' Leibush in the nose. The Sfas Emes came out and asked what happened. R' Leibush began to cry and said he traveled for miles, waited for hours, and he didn't have children for 15 years. He never came because he was so embarrassed. He is sorry he came. The Sfas Emes said he is sorry that he will not see him until R' Leibush forgives him. Chaim wanted to leave. R' Leibush grabbed him and said to the Sfas Emes. I promise I will not forgive until you can promise that he will have a child. Both Chaim and the rebbe began to cry. He gave him a berachah and nine months later he had a child with Leibush the first to be notified.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 283

❖ It was just after WWII. The survivors, broken in heart and spirit, surrounded the great Rebbe Reb Aharon of Belz. "Rebbe, how can we possibly go on?" they cried. "We've lost everyone and everything. How can we carry on, Rebbe? How?" Reb Aharon spoke softly to his people. "The Gemara says that techias hameisim is alluded to in the verses of az yashir. I ask

you, why do we learn about techias hameisim specifically from there? I'll tell you why. Because just a short while earlier, eighty percent of the Jewish people died in the plague of darkness. That means that everyone at krias yam suf must have lost at least one family member and most of them probably more. Yet here they were, singing shirah. How could people who had just sustained such losses possibly have been able to sing? The answer is that they had full belief in techias hameisim. They realized their mourning would be limited. They understood that they could and must carry on. We too," the Rebbe concluded, tears flowing down his cheeks, "must focus on our faith in techias hameisim and the knowledge that we'll be reunited with our loved ones. We can and must carry on." Those present felt as though a new spirit of life had been breathed into them.

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ An elderly wealthy man had a son who was an outright ignoramus. The father knew that when in a number of years his son would inherit all of his silver and gold, he would foolishly squander his entire fortune. He therefore took a large box and placed in it several letters containing words of approbation and pleas for help, customarily carried by individuals collecting charity. He then placed all of his money on top of the letter. "At least," thought the elderly man, "my son will be able to take these letters and request some donations to sustain himself after he fritters away the inheritance..." Hashem, said the Dubno Maggid, established a Beis Hamikdash and a sacrificial rite for the Jewish Nation. Yet it was revealed before Him that the Beis Hamikdash would one day be destroyed. He therefore placed the thought into the heart of David HaMelech and the Sages to establish prayers for us, so that we would be left with a means capable of giving life to our souls.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Aged and weak, Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta lay in bed. By his side sat Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, and near them sat Reb Naftali of Ropshitz, still a young man. "Rabbi of Ropshitz!" said the bedridden tzaddik, who is commonly called the Ohev Yisrael ("the lover of his fellow Jew"). "What do you say to the language of the Shemoneh Esreh prayer on the eve of Yom Kippur this year?" The rabbi of Ropshitz smiled. Now the shammes who attended Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov was no simpleton. He approached Reb Naftali and asked him to explain what lay behind this little exchange. He did not quite dare to ask his own rebbe, nor would he be so bold as to ask the tzaddik of Apta. Reb Naftali obliged, and explained that on the eve of that Day of Judgment a grievous decree had hovered over the House of Israel, threatening the lives of women, especially those that were with child. A simple villager was making his fervent requests at the afternoon Minchah prayer just before the fast-day began. As he was stumbling his unlettered way through the Shemoneh Esreh prayer he came to the words Uvarech sheloseinu kashanim hatovos, "Bless our year like the good years." In his ignorance the good man had transposed a few letters here and there: Barech neshoseinu kanashim hatovos "Bless our wives like the good women..." And on he went, until he arrived at the conclusion of that paragraph, which reads: "Blessed art Thou, O' Lord, Who blesses the years." Here too, with his urgent plea still foremost in his mind, he had earnestly read: baruch atah Hashem, mevarech hanashim - "Who blesses the womenfolk..." His innocent prayer, surging forth from the deepest recesses of his heart, had risen to the highest heavens - and the decree was annulled. And that was why the tzaddikim had exchanged a smile.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 100

❖ Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro told the following incredible story. Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Rosenblatt, residents of Florida, live a comfortable life. Dr. Rosenblatt is a top oncologist, well-respected in his field. One day, several years ago, Mrs. Rosenblatt was driving on the highway when she noticed an old, beat-up car several lanes over with a "For Sale" sign in the window. On a whim, she decided to call the number. As she later recounted the story to Rabbi Shapiro, she paused and admitted, "I have no idea why I called. My husband and I both have brand-new cars. We had absolutely no need for an old one." A young man answered the phone. "I just saw your advertisement," she said. "May I ask why you're selling your car? "Again, she paused in her retelling. "I have no idea why I asked that question either. He could have easily told me it was none of my business." But

instead of dismissing her, the young man broke down in tears. "My wife and I got married a few years ago. We were living happily in South America until she was diagnosed with a severe illness. We came to South Florida for treatment, but every doctor we saw told us the same thing: 'The only doctor who can help you now is Dr. Joseph Rosenblatt.' But we don't have insurance here... so I'm selling my car just to afford an appointment with him." Mrs. Rosenblatt was stunned. "Dr. Rosenblatt is my husband," she told him. "Go pick up your wife right now and bring her to the hospital. I'm calling my husband -- he will treat her at no charge." Indeed, Dr. Rosenblatt was able to help save the young woman's life. The man was desperately searching for a doctor, and Hashem not only led him to the right one -- He arranged for the doctor's own wife to make the call, offering the appointment free of charge. Hashem orchestrates every detail of our lives. He connects us to the right people at the right time. And when we turn to Him, we are never alone.

Table Talk, Edition 428 (Parshas Yisro), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky was a Rav in Toronto from the late 40's into the early 50's. In 1950 a rumor was being spread that Moshiach was coming that year. One of Reb Yaakov's constituents approached him with the following question. "Tell me, Rebbe, is Moshiach really coming this year?" Reb Yaakov asked him what difference it made whether Moshiach came this year or a different year. The man explained that he owns a retail store and because of his situation he is unable to close his store on Shabbos. "But if Moshiach is coming this year, I do not want Moshiach to catch me with the store open on Shabbos." Therefore, if he knew Moshiach was coming he would shut the store on Shabbos. Reb Yaakov responded to him that the chances of Moshiach coming this year are the same as his coming last year or next year. Reb Yaakov explained to me that although this fellow would have closed his store on Shabbos for the entire year, nevertheless, if Moshiach would not have come, after the year he would return to opening the store on Shabbos and would have lost his hope of the arrival of Moshiach. Now, he has trust in the arrival of Moshiach and is even concerned about being caught as a mechalel Shabbos!

As told by Paysach Diskind

❖ Several times on Chol HaMoed, the Kanievsky children asked Rav Chaim to take them to the zoo. Rav Chaim, who preferred to stay home, initially asked if the Rebbetzin could take them in his place. The children reminded him of the opportunity to recite the berachah of Meshaneh HaBriyos. Rav Chaim said that if it is so meaningful for the children to spend time with him, in conjunction with making the berachah, he would gladly take the family. One Chol HaMoed Pesach, as they made their way through the animal and bird enclosures, Rav Chaim cited references from Chazal about each creature they saw. After a while, a large group of Bnei Brak residents had gathered around Rav Chaim to hear him summarize the various Midrashim and Yerushalmis that discuss each species. Other visitors noticed and came closer to see what was happening. Pretty soon, Rav Chaim was leading a huge crowd through the zoo as an inadvertent spiritual tour guide, teaching the Torah related to each animal!

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

❖ A pauper had a wealthy relative who was about to marry his son to a girl from an aristocratic family. A wedding of such magnitude would surely require much preparation and even the pauper adequately readied himself for the great event. "It goes without saying," thought the pauper, "that my relative will arrange a feast that is fit for a king. It is therefore worth my while to abstain from food and drink for two days before the wedding. This way, I will have an enormous appetite on the day of the affair and will be able to derive full benefit from the scrumptious delicacies that are sure to be served." And so he did. He fasted for two full days, refusing to allow a morsel of food to enter his mouth. When evening fell on the day of the wedding, the pauper who felt faint stood by the window and peered out, as he wished to see if his wealthy relative's servants were knocking on his door in order to extend him an invitation. To his great anguish, however, he saw his relative's servants rushing to the homes of the city's distinguished residents, yet they bypassed his own. "Please hurry, my dear wife," exclaimed the pauper. "In another moment, I will faint from hunger. Please prepare me whatever food we have in the house." The devoted wife rushed and served her husband stale bread, a few onions, and garlic. She also managed to scrounge up a radish

and placed it all before her unfortunate husband who literally devoured every bit of food that she served him. After he was satiated and had bentched (recited the Grace After Meals), he suddenly heard a knock at the door. The wealthy man's servants had come to invite him to the wedding. Embittered, the pauper walked to the wedding and sat at a table. For the first course, he was served baked fish that had been caught that very day. The fish was elegantly served on a silver tray and accompanied by a garland of vegetables. The pauper tried a piece of the fish, yet the only thing he tasted was the radish that he had eaten prior to the wedding. Next he was served tender roasted calf smothered in sweet gravy. Along with the main course came a side dish of baked potatoes and delicious mushrooms. The pauper tasted the delicacy and immediately grimaced — the taste of the garlic and onions that he had eaten in his home still lingered on his palate. The pauper sat at the extravagant feast but did not taste another thing. When the guests began to depart at the conclusion of the meal, the pauper overheard how they were lauding the amazing feast with praise, noting how they had not enjoyed such a meal in quite some time. "Surely you are joking with me," said the pauper to the guests. "I also partook of the feast, yet I did not find it tasty at all." The men were astounded, until one of the wealthy man's servants put their astonishment to rest. "Do not be the least bit surprised!" remarked the servant. "I am the one who invited him to the wedding, and I saw how he had finished eating a meal that consisted of garlic, onion, and radish right before he came here... After such a meal — how did you expect these royal delicacies to taste?" Hashem gave us the Torah and mitzvos which are "sweeter than honey and drippings of the combs" (Tehillim 19:11), said the Dubno Maggid. In order to taste the amazing flavor of the holy Torah, however, one must approach mitzvah performance with a pure heart and soul. But if an individual has sated his soul with the bitterness of worldly temptations, how will he possibly experience the delectable taste of the royal delicacies of Hashem, the King of the World?

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A bachur in the yeshivah in Adelphia once committed an act of vandalism, and local police officers appeared in the yeshivah to apprehend him. Rabbi Dovid Trenk heard about it and came tearing out of the beis medrash, running toward the police car. Rabbi Trenk saw the bachur about to be handcuffed, and he drew himself up to his full height and roared, "I am responsible for this boy and you can be sure he will get "what he deserves..." Rabbi Trenk addressed the officer. "Can you leave him with me and I will take him to the woodshed and discipline him the old-fashioned way?" The officer looked Rabbi Trenk up and down and nodded. 'Yes," he said, thrusting the boy toward his teacher. Rabbi Trenk did take the young man with him, leading back inside the building. He lifted him up and... kissed him on the forehead, gently asking, "Tzaddik, why? How could you?"

From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Brisker Rav's perspective on current events was often at odds with the consensus, sometimes diametrically so. He once asked me, "Which of the following scenarios would have a greater impact on you: a young person who was struck and killed by a car while crossing the street, or an old man who passed away peacefully in his sleep?" The Brisker Rav intended to point out that in general, people are shocked when they hear that a young person was killed in tragic circumstances. On the other hand; attending an elderly person's funeral doesn't move them so strongly. The Brisker Rav explained just how shallow this way of thinking was; and in actuality, the opposite should hold true. In the first case of young person killed in a car accident it really should make less of an impact of the two," he said; "Because it is an unusual occurrence people can think, 'That won't happen to me.' But the elderly person who passes away in his bed should have a very deep impact on every single one because we know that one day, it will happen to us, as well, and that we therefore have to make the most of our time on earth.

In Their Shadow, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ Moshe and Sara were a perfect couple. He was wealthy and kind and extremely respected in the community. Sara was beautiful and sweet, and extremely involved in the community. Everybody adored them. They appeared to have the perfect life. But there was one problem, they could not have children. They had an incredibly close and loving marriage, and finally, after 20 years of marriage, they were blessed with a pregnancy. Everything seemed to be going well in the delivery room until the doctor informed Moshe with a grave expression that a life-threatening complication had arisen and only either mother or child could be saved. Moshe desperately davened for both to survive, and following halachah, said that his wife's life must come first. However, Sara, sensing that her own life was slipping away, asked to speak to him: "I know how much you love me, and I appreciate your devotion so deeply. Please do everything possible to save our baby so that we will leave a living legacy in this world. But there is one condition, please. Please promise me that when the baby is old enough to understand, that you will take the child to my gravestone and tell him how much his mother loved him, and gave up everything so that he could live. An hour later she passed away. When the baby boy was five years old, Moshe held the boys hand and brought him to her grave stone and told him about his mother who gave up her life so that he could live. They came every year. That inspired the boy to live a beautiful life that would make his mother proud of her sacrifice and make sure she did not die in vain, and pass on her legacy. This is a mashal for the shechina. There became a point when it was clear that the shechina and Klal Yisrael could not continue to live. The Shechina chose to sacrifice itself so that Klal Yisrael could continue, but on the condition that we visit the tombstone, the Kotel, to remember her sacrifice, and make sure our mother did not die in vain.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 141

❖ Harav Ovadia Yosef's relationship with the Persian community extended beyond the Persian Jews living in Eretz Yisrael. He spent time with Jewish Persian communities worldwide — in New York, Los Angeles, and other locations — and eventually visited their country of origin, Iran, in 1979. One of his stops was in Mashhad, Iran's second most populous city, where he expressed an opinion that community members consider a clear sign of his ruach hakodesh: One of the most impressive achievements of the Mashhad Jewish community was the construction of Beis Knesses Anjoman, a magnificent synagogue and communal center. Aside from the beis knesses that seated several hundred congregants, the four — story building included a simchah hall, a large kitchen, and rooms for youth activities, all designed and constructed with high-end materials. The total cost of the building was 3.6 million toman," at a time when one could purchase a house with a lawn, a pool, and all other amenities for just 100,000 toman. When community leaders brought Harav Ovadia to visit this edifice, his reaction took them by surprise. "Why are you investing so much in the buildings, and not in developing learning programs for the youth?" he asked. "Do you realize that in Europe, all the money the Jews invested into buildings and the like went to waste during the Holocaust and only the money invested in education bore fruit for future generations? " Communal leaders gently pointed out that their situation in Iran was extremely secure and favorable, unlike that of the Jews in Europe during the thousand years they lived there before the Holocaust. The leaders of Iran's Jewish community shared close ties with the Shah; with one phone call to his palace they would be granted an immediate audience with him, even though such a meeting took months for anyone else to schedule. Rav Ovadia would not be deterred. "This could all go to waste in a matter of moments, " he insisted. At a hesped after his passing, Mr. Yaakov Avrahami, the secretary of the Mashhad community in Bnei Brak, recounted with wonder and sadness how these words had been proven all too true: "A few months after his visit, the Islamic revolution began. The Shah was overthrown, and all the affluent Jewish leaders in the city had to run for their lives. "Beis Knesses Anjoman now sits desolate during the week, and when it is open on Shabbos and the festivals, the Jews who participate in the tefillos are all newcomers; not one person is left from the large community that built the beis knesses. "This was all a direct sign of Rav Ovadia's ruach hakodesh."

Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The great advocate for Klal Yisrael, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, would often say. "Ribbono Shel Olam, what does it take to build a building? Some iron, some stones, and some water. Well, we have plenty of that. "Iron? "Look at the ironclad resilience of Klal Yisrael. We have been tested time and time again, and we have remained steadfast and strong like iron. So many have tried to force us to bend our ways and we have not bent one iota. "Stone? "Nebach Ribbono Shel Olam, there have been those who have not been able to withstand the suffering, and their hearts have turned to stone. They have tried, but the challenges have been too great; their soft and sensitive hearts have been transformed into stone. "Water? "Oy vei How many tears have been shed throughout our long, bitter galus? How many tzubruchene [broken] hearts have cried rivers and oceans of tears? How many treren [tears] have been spilled over the tragedies of our brothers and sisters? "So You see You have everything You need. "Then what are You waiting for?"

Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A pauper walked along the road with his bundle slung over his shoulder. He was extremely thirsty, and his tongue was literally sticking to his palate, but he had no water with which to quench his thirst. Some time later, he began to experience pangs of hunger that grew so bothersome that he forgot all about his thirst. He eventually reached his destination, and he entered the first house that he saw. It happened to be the home of one of the wealthiest men in the city. It was mealtime when he entered the house, and he immediately noticed a table laden with a vast assortment of delicacies and delights, as well as outstanding beverages. "If I request a modicum of food," thought the pauper to himself, "I will remain thirsty. But if I ask for something to drink, I will remain hungry." So what did he do? He began to plead with his host to extend him an invitation to dine with him at his table. The wealthy man agreed, and the pauper ate until he was satisfied and drank until his thirst had been quenched. When a Jew stands in prayer, noted the Dubno Maggid, his heart is filled with a multitude of requests that he wishes to ask of Hashem. On one hand, he has spiritual requests, and on the other hand, he has material needs as well. So what should he do? He should beseech the Master of the World that He allow him to be like a son who sits at the table of his Father Who fully provides for him. In this way, he will lack nothing at all!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Mrs. Michal Trenk, a neighbor of Rebbetzin Henny Machlis recalled the following story. Rebbetzin Machlis' indescribable power of prayer was matched only by her extraordinary Ahavas Yisrael. I experienced this myself when I was expecting my third child. I had been counting down to my due date with much anticipation. Any time I'd see any of the Machlis family, they'd smile and cheer me on: "You're almost there, Michal!" Or, "Hang in there, you're doing great!" The big day came and went, with no sign of anything happening. Friday night after the seudah I was pacing back and forth outside my apartment as the last of the Machlis's 150 weekly guests were leaving. "Nu, any news, Michal?" Mrs. Machlis asked with her typical warmth, as if there was nothing else on her mind on that Friday night. "Nope. Nothing," I said, frustrated. "Don't worry, I'll daven for you. All at the right time" she added nonchalantly. The next morning I woke up early and asked my husband not to go to shul. "I think something is happening" Our daughter was born a few hours later. When I returned home from the hospital, I met Mrs. Machlis. "Mrs. Machlis! Remember I saw you last night? You'll never believe it - the very next morning I went into labor!" I said. "Oh how wonderful!" Rebbetzin Machlis replied. "Like I told you - all in the right time. By the way, what time did your contractions start?" she asked, casually "Oh, I don't know, I guess a little before 6 a.m. Why?" She smiled. "I had told you I would daven for you, so right after we spoke I stayed up all night and said the entire Sefer Tehillim for you. I finished a little before 6 a.m." That was Mrs. Machlis.

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❖ A king had a son for whom he provided fully. If the son was ever in need of anything, he would simply place a request with his father, who would lovingly give him whatever he needed. One day, the son transgressed the will of his father. The king was furious and reprimanded his son, but it was to no avail — the son's disobedience persisted. The king summoned

one of his closest officers and said to him, "Generously provide my son with his each and every need." The officer was absolutely bewildered by the king's instructions and asked, "Your Highness, why are you providing your son with his every need if he is does not travel the upright path?" "You have not fully grasped my intentions," answered the king. "You see, as long as my son was acting properly, I wished to see him every single day. Therefore, whenever he required something, he would come to me; I would be happy to receive him and fulfill his requests. But now that he has veered from the proper path, even though I still love him, I do not wish to see him at all! I am therefore instructing you to provide him with all of his needs so that he will no longer come before me." Hashem, in His great love for us, granted us the privilege to pray before Him three times a day and, at any moment that we choose, to ask Him to provide us with all of our needs, even when we have strayed from the proper path. In His abundant mercy, He fulfills the verse, "You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing"

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One night, after long hours of study, Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach asked his study partner, "If you had-the chance to ask G-d for just one wish, and a promise that it would be fulfilled, what would your request be?" His friend replied, "I would ask for an adequate income, so I wouldn't have to starve. And you, Elazar Menachem Man'eh? What would you wish for?" The boy answered simply, "I would ask for more clarity of mind to understand His Torah, and greater capacity to retain what I learn." Years later, when the Vaboilniker was a recognized leader in the Torah world, his former study partner came to visit him at his home in Bnei Brak. He mentioned this forgotten discussion and sadly said, "I wished for sustenance, and I worked all my life in a slaughterhouse and still I'm left with no money. But you who asked for more Torah, received all you wished for, and now you lead the Torah world.

Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 95

❖ Rabbi Yaakov Bender, the Rosh Yeshivah of Darchei Torah of Far Rockaway called Zev Cohen, who runs a home security company. He asked Reb Zev to please install a camera at the entrance of his father-in-law's apartment. Rabbi Bender's father-in-law, Rabbi Yehudah Elchonon Diskind, who taught fourth grade in the Yeshivah of Eastern Parkway for many decades, lived in a Flatbush apartment on the second floor and was unable to walk down the steep flight of steps to allow guests in. Zev installed a wired system by which Rabbi Diskind could see who was at the door and, with the press of a button, could allow them to enter. Just a few days ago I met Zev for the first time and told him my name. When he heard my name was Diskind, he asked me if Rabbi Yehudah Elchonon was my uncle. He proceeded to share with me a special hanhaga that my uncle had. For many years, several times a year, usually on erev Yom Tov, Rabbi Diskind would call his house. Most of the time Reb Zev's wife answered the phone. My uncle would tell Mrs. Cohen, "Please tell your husband how grateful I am to him for putting that camera by my door. Nowadays it is seldom that I go out. I rarely see people other than my family. By using that camera I am able to see out onto the street and feel somewhat part of society." He always expressed his appreciation for the gifts he had been granted, no matter how many times.

Told By Rabbi Paysach Diskind

❖ A king had two mighty and courageous sons. One day, the king went out to battle his enemies, and his two sons accompanied him as commanders in his army. The sons fought with strength and bravery, until one of them was surrounded by the enemy and taken captive. The king's son languished in the enemy prison, starving and deprived, and after an entire year, ultimately succeeded in digging a tunnel that enabled him to escape from captivity. The prince ran away, crossing over rivers and lakes, and trekking through forests and mountains. After a while, he finally managed to return to his father's home. How great was the elation in the king's palace upon the prince's return. Elaborate celebrations were staged in his honor, and the king sat him to his right and showered him with gifts. Without a doubt, this son's joy is ten times greater

than a son who had never left his father's home. This is the identical happiness, said R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, that a person feels when he returns in complete repentance to his Father in Heaven. His joy is ten times greater than one who has never sinned, for only once a person has saved himself from sin can he truly perceive the taste of "captivity."

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A certain pauper was regularly supported by the generous donations of a wealthy man. One day, the pauper went to the wealthy man's house in order to receive his customary allocation. His desires got the best of him, however, and he began to covet a garment that he saw in the house. Eventually he stole the garment from his benefactor. When the matter became known to the wealthy man, he grew irate and told the pauper in no uncertain terms that from that day on, he dare not step foot into his home ever again. Furthermore, exclaimed the wealthy man, the customary stipend was canceled indefinitely! Without the wealthy man's assistance, the predicament in the pauper's home deteriorated, until he was no longer able to provide bread for his children. Left with no other choice, the pauper decided to take action. He knew that each day the wealthy man would stroll through the forest that was adjacent to the city. One day, shortly before the designated time, the pauper went to the forest. He looked around and found a small cave; he then hid inside and waited. When he heard the wealthy man approaching, he yelled loudly, "Please save me! Please take pity on me!" "Who are you?" asked the wealthy man. "Approach me and I will help you to the best of my ability." "This I cannot do," answered the pauper, "for I am embarrassed to show my face before you." The wealthy man repeated his request several times, but the pauper refused to leave his hiding place. "I am ashamed," said the pauper. "I am unable to leave this cave and face you, for I stole a garment from your home, and I am wearing it..." We stand in prayer, said the Dubno Maggid, and exclaim, "I called to you from the depths, Hashem" (Tehillim 130:1)! — We conceal ourselves in hiding places and cry out, "O Lord, hear my voice, may Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas" — We are ashamed and humiliated to appear before You, Hashem, King of all Kings. Therefore be attentive to the sounds of our cries. Why are we ashamed? "If You preserve iniquities, O God, O Lord, who could survive (ya'amod)?" — We are clothed from head to foot in sin, and who could stand (la'amod) before You in such a manner?

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ R' Eytan Kobre told over the following story: Elul was an intense time at Yeshivah Maalos HaTorah, and Reb Shmuel Auerbach would give two shmuessen each week during that month. One time, as he was making his way to the front of the beis medrash to deliver a shmuess, he made a slight detour to approach a talmid sitting off to the side. Taking the student's hand, he whispered, "Oz v'chedvah bimkomo! A Yid has to be happy above all, especially during the Y'mei Harachamim! I'm asking you to take your Gemara downstairs and learn there during my shmuess -- but only b'simchah, b'simchah, b'simchah!" Why did Reb Shmuel do this? He had discerned that this young man was going through a period of melancholy and felt that an Elul-type shmuess would not be beneficial for him in his current state.

Table Talk, Edition 404 (Parshas Reeh), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

❖ Rav Aharon Kotler said: It is well known that whoever saw the Gaon daven, just once, was so inspired that he davened better for at least two years. He then related that he heard from the Rav of Mir, Reb Elya Boruch Kamai related that his grandfather had personally seen the Vilna Gaon daven one time and for the rest of his life he davened differently.

The Legacy of Rav Aharon Kotler, By Rabbi Yitzchok Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ A wealthy man had a dedicated servant who was at his service whenever he was needed. On one occasion, the employer had to take a journey in order to tend to his many business matters, and he would be compelled to leave his home for several weeks. He summoned his servant, gave him a long list of instructions, and said, "Please read this list each and every day, so that you do not forget to perform a single task from all that I have written here." The servant nodded his head in order to indicate that he understood. The employer boarded the luxurious coach that was waiting outside for him and set off on his journey. When he returned, he summoned his servant and asked him if he had followed his instructions. "Yes, sir," answered the servant. "Each day, I read over the list that you wrote several times..." "You fool!" shouted the employer in a

voice that stung of rebuke. "Did I ask you only to read the list? My whole intention was that you would read the list and remember to fulfill that which I commanded you! Reading it alone is absolutely useless!" The same thing applies to prayer, noted the Chofetz Chaim. If an individual picks up a siddur and reads it without any kavanah, he is similar to the foolish servant...

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ It was 3:10 a.m. the second night of Selichos in Monsey. R' Pinchas got up early to be part of a minyan in the beis midrash of his holy rebbi, R' Chaim Zanvil Abramowitz, the Ribnitzer Rebbe. He knew that the Rebbe first said Tikkun Chatzos for hours and immediately afterward would say Selichos if there was a minyan. Understandably, at that time of night, it was hard to find a minyan. Therefore, on the way to the Ribnitzer Beis Midrash, R' Pinchas stopped off in another shul in the neighborhood to see if perhaps he could find other Yidden to come with him to the Rebbe's minyan. Sure enough, he found another Yid sitting alone in the back of the shul holding a Selichos at the first page. He rushed happily toward the man, saying, "R' Yid, why say Selichos by yourself? Come with me to the Rebbe, where we will say Selichos with a minyan. I will drive you there and back home." Immediately, the man stood up, got into the car, and they were off to the Rebbe's beis midrash. They entered, and as it turned out, they completed the minyan. Now the Rebbe could approach the amud to lead Selichos. As soon as the tzaddik noticed that they had a minyan, he wrapped himself in a tallis. With his face aflame, he opened his Selichos and then... nothing! Something was stopping them from starting the Selichos. He looked here and there, then focused his stare at the Yidden around him. Again he tried to begin "Ashrei yoshvei veisecha," but there was some problem. There was silence in the beis midrash, and one could sense apprehension in the air. No one understood the reason for the delay. Again, the Rebbe approached the amud and tried to commence with Ashrei, but he immediately stopped. He walked around, scrutinizing everyone there with his piercing look. Now there was fear in the eyes of the mispallelim. Which one of them was responsible for this delay? Minute after minute passed in silence, with all of them looking at the tzaddik in wonder and confusion. Again he tried Ashrei but stopped. Finally, he turned to the tzibbur and asked, "Is there anyone here who already said Selichos?" All of them answered that they didn't. Again the Rebbe tried to begin, but when he couldn't, he turned to them and asked once again, "Is there anyone who already said Selichos?" Again they all answered a definite no. Suddenly, the guest that R' Pinchas had brought from the other shul thought to himself, "Maybe the Rebbe means me. I already said a few pesukim of Selichos by myself." Seeing that the Rebbe remained silent, he walked over and whispered, "I already started before. I just said the first few pesukim." The Rebbe said, "Indeed, now I know. Now I understand everything. We don't have a minyan to say Selichos." "We don't have a minyan?" they all wondered. "We have ten Yidden standing here who did not yet recite Selichos." Here the Rebbe revealed to them a mysterious secret: "Yes, there are ten Yidden here, but one of them already started saying Selichos. Therefore, he is standing in a different realm than the rest of us and is isolated from the rest of the group. Because when a Yid just begins to say Selichos, even with a few random pesukim, he is already welcomed by Hashem into a special sphere and is no longer together with us in the same situation." This is astonishing. How great is the power of just a few pesukim in Selichos and how high they can elevate us! The tzaddik, with his keen spiritual senses, was able to feel this. He saw that there was someone there who had already jumped to a higher level and had already advanced toward our Father in Shamayim due to just a few pesukim that he said. How heartening it is to know what power we have in our hands. How encouraging it is to know that every small step we take forward, every pasuk, every tefillah, every tear shed, can help lift us up to such great heights, to such closeness to Hashem, beyond anything that we can imagine.

From Moments Of Greatness By R' Yitzchak Hisiger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ When the Sfas Emes was older he became nearly deaf. One day he was in the middle of a shiur, when everyone started talking. He asked a talmid what the commotion was, and the talmid said that there was thunder and they were making a berachah on the thunder. The Sfas Emes began to cry. When he stopped crying, he said when I could hear, I would use the

sound of thunder to think about the great power of Hashem and it would inspire me to do teshuvah. But now I realize that I can no longer hear thunder. What will wake me up to inspire me to do teshuvah. The talmidim never said the berachah on thunder the same again.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 121

❖ On one occasion, a prince angered his father, the king. Irate, the king banished his son from the palace without giving him a penny. His son wandered from city to city, collecting alms and barely managing to sustain himself. When he grew weary of collecting charity, he made his way to the house of an elderly villager and offered to perform any form of labor that he desired, be it in the house or the field. The villager took the young boy into his home, and the man was not disappointed. The boy worked with great vigor and performed any task that his master requested, whether it was working in the fields or tending to the animals. In exchange, the villager allowed the boy to board in his home, and he provided him with a meager meal as well. One day, the villager died and his estate fell into the hands of his son. Trouble soon arose, however, as the son was a wicked man who increased the workloads of all of the villager's servants while at the same time decreasing their benefits. Meanwhile, the king was in his palace in the capital city. He was sad and depressed over not having received any word of his son throughout the past several years, and not having any idea where he was or what he was doing. He therefore decided to travel around his kingdom and proclaim wherever he went that whoever had a request to make of the king or a grievance that needed to be settled was invited to come before him and state his claim. Indeed, wherever the king went, long lines formed, consisting of the heavily burdened as well as feuding parties, in order to relate their troubles to the king. The king's travels eventually brought him to the city in which his son resided. The son, as well, was among the individuals who lined up to speak with the king, and when it came his turn, he fell before the king and cried, "Your Highness! I work for a certain villager who forces me to do overbearing labor! I beg of you, order him to provide me with bread each day and not to oppress me so..." The king fell on his son's neck and exclaimed, "Woe is me, that I must see you in such a state! Are you so heavily burdened that you have completely forgotten about your esteemed lineage? You are the son of a king, and your place is in the palace of kings. Instead of asking me for stale bread, ask me for permission to return to the palace!" The Jewish Nation are the children of kings, said the Dubno Maggid. But the darkness of exile and the oppression we have endured have caused us to forget this fact. We therefore stand in prayer and request no more than a slice of bread. We must beseech Hashem to renew our days as of old!

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Yaakov was a bachur from Chicago who would stay by his friends the Goldenfields to date in New York. Yosef Goldenfield was always a very upbeat happy personality. One day Yosef heard the news that his father, who was sick for a long time had passed away. Yosef was saddened by the news but didn't break down. Yosef then said that he would tell his mother the news. His parents had been married for a very long time and they had a very close and loving relationship. When Yaakov came back to the house later he found Yosef sobbing uncontrollably. He was wondering why Yosef was crying now. What can be worse that news of his father's death. Yosef told him. You are probably wondering why I am crying worse. I'll tell you, when I told my mother the news she said calmly and with a blank look, "oh". You see she has Alzheimer's, and she doesn't even know who I am talking about. I don't know what's worse. The fact that my father died, or the fact that my loving mother can't care less. On Tisha B'Av we mourn the loss of the shechina. Which is worse the loss, or the fact so many Jews have "Alzheimer's" don't remember the loving relationship, and can't care less.

Touched by a Story, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 124

❖ Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach left home fifteen minutes before shul started in order to get to minchah, even though it was a two-minute walk. When asked by a family member why he allowed so much time for the walk, Reb Shlomo Zalman replied, "If you had a meeting with the President of the United States you wouldn't take any chances on being late. You

would make absolutely certain that you would be there on time. I don't want to take any chances on being late to my meeting with the Ribbono shel Olam."

Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ An anecdote about the Brisker Rav's arrival in Switzerland serves to illustrate his extraordinary ways: Normally, a person who arrives in a new country spends time looking around and taking in his new surroundings. All the more in a place like Switzerland which is famous for its spectacular mountain views. When The Brisker Rav first set foot on Swiss soil, however, he took a compass out from his pocket to ascertain which way was east, i.e., in which direction was Eretz Yisrael, in order to orient himself during prayers." Hashem's presence was always foremost in The Brisker Rav's mind. Wherever a Jew travels, his first step in a new place is not toward any worldly objective, but rather to do Hashem's will. Anything not directly connected with this is of secondary importance.

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 3, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 422

❖ All the people of the land obviously recognize their king. But when the king goes out to war, he is accustomed to disguising himself so as to not be recognized by anyone. Even at such a time, the ministers and close company of the king who are constantly in his presence are familiar with his every movement, and even if he should change his attire, they will nevertheless recognize him with ease. There is one way, though, that even the general populace can figure out where the king is located. Let them simply observe where there is the highest concentration of security — that is where the king can be found! When an individual prepares himself to pray, said R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, the yetzer hara immediately intervenes in an attempt to disturb his kavanah and break his concentration. A person must know, however, that the obstacle that he faces clearly indicates that this is where the King is found! The fact that kavanah is so hard shows that "security" is heaviest there Hashem is close to all who call upon Him sincerely (see Tehillim 145:18). It is incumbent upon one who prays to try with all his might to overcome the obstacle and reach the King.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb David Moshe of Chortkov told the story of a difficult moment in the life of his grandfather. "When my grandfather Reb Shalom of Probisht was once at the home of his father-in-law Reb Nachum of Chernobyl," he said, "it so happened that while Reb Nachum was leading his congregation in the last Minchah service of the outgoing year with his accustomed ecstasy, my grandfather sensed that he himself and suddenly slipped from the lofty levels of divine service to which he had raised himself over the years. He found it quite impossible to worship in the way that a tzaddik commonly worships. He was sorely grieved. Why should this have befallen him at a moment like this, when every other Jew was now praying with his highest degree of devoutness? He made every effort to recapture his accustomed fervor, but in vain. Finally, after prodigious exertion, he succeeded somehow in making his way through the prayers with nothing more ambitious than a consistent attentiveness to the meaning of the words he was uttering - just like every ordinary worshiper does. '.'As soon as he reached the end of his prayers Reb Nachum approached him and exclaimed: 'My son! What eloquent reverberations you set up in the heavens just now with your afternoon prayers! Do you know that thousands of erring souls were elevated through your words?'"

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, By Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 29

❖ As any old-timer will tell you, Pinsk and Karlin are so near each other that they can almost be regarded as one town. During the period that Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was rav of Pinsk and the surrounding regions, there lived in the neighboring town Reb Shlomo of Karlin, who died the death of a martyr in 1792. One day Reb Levi Yitzchak asked that Reb Shlomo be called to him. Reb Shlomo duly arrived, and for a few hours they sat together, their faces ablaze with holy fire. Not a word did they exchange. After a long time they both broke out in uproarious laughter, and Reb Shlomo returned soon after to his home in Karlin. This whole strange scene was witnessed by Reb Levi Yitzchak's attendant, who was so puzzled by it that he asked the rebbe to explain. "All the Jews of our entire region," said the tzaddik, "were under the threat

of a fearful verdict that was being considered in the Heavenly Court. The local gentile aristocracy had been consulting on the imminent expulsion of the Jews. They had therefore decided to call a meeting at which they would all sign a proclamation which would bring this into effect. I prayed with all my might that the evil decree be rescinded; I received no answer. One day I implored with all the intensity of mesirus nefesh, and I was told from Above that Shlomo the son of Yuta would be able to help out in this case, because Eliyahu the Prophet visits him frequently. I therefore asked to have him come here at the exact hour for which that fateful meeting had been called. "Reb Shlomo arrived, and it was then that we saw that every single nobleman there was giving his assent to the proposed decree! We were so seized by terror that we could not utter a word. "Now according to their procedure, any single one of them can veto a proposal. At this point, then, we saw Eliyahu the Prophet walk in and join their meeting in the guise of an elderly squire. He took his seat among them, and when the document reached him for his signature, he insisted loudly that he would never agree to such an edict'. In fact, he would withhold his signature. This shattered their unanimity, and in the fracas that followed between their rivaling factions the document itself was torn to shreds. "This was such a hilarious sight that we broke out in laughter. Imagine: a whole assemblage of fools allowing an utter stranger to upset their plans!"

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, p. 308

❖ Reb Chaim Soloveitchik's house was open to all. At some point, the leaders of the community decided that it was not proper for beggars to frequent the home of the city's Rav, so they appointed someone to stand guard at the door and turn these people away. It did not take long for Reb Chaim to realize that his house had become very quiet, and he soon discovered why. He dismissed the guard and explained as follows. "We have a mitzvah of halachta bidrachav, to go in Hashem's ways. We do not need intermediaries to gain access to Hashem; we daven directly to Him. People should not need intermediaries to gain access to my home either. "

Rav Belsky, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ After living in Yerushalayim for about a year's time, the Satmar Rebbe, Harav Yoel Teitelbaum, decided to relocate to America. One day, a guest came knocking on his door — Rav Osher Zelig Margulius, one of the most prominent Torah sages of the city. He had heard about the Rebbe's impending move, and he came personally to dissuade him from going through with his decision. "Our Rebbe, our leader," he addressed the Satmar Rebbe, "in whose care will you be leaving us, should you move to America? If G-d forbid someone will face a misfortune, whom will he have to turn to?" he asked. "Let me give you some practical advice," the Rebbe said pensively. "If anyone will be seeking a blessing that will have an impact in Heaven, all he has to do is go to a shul and keep his eyes open during Shacharis. When the congregants roll up their sleeves to place the tefillin on their forearms, watch for a person displaying a tattooed number engraved into his flesh. "That is the person to whom you should turn, for after having gone through that purgatory, he was so totally cleansed and purified that his blessing surely has great weight in the Heavenly court."

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One of Rav Scheinberg's talmidim, who was also a Rosh Yeshivah, came to Rav Scheinberg for a berachah for one of his talmidim, who was struggling and in need of a yeshuah. Rav Scheinberg listened carefully; the pained expression on his face revealed how much he cared. Then he asked his talmid for the boy's name and the name of his mother, so he could daven for him. But the talmid admitted that he did not know the boy's mother's name. Rav Scheinberg gave his disciple a look of disappointment. "How could a rebbi not know the name of his talmid's mother? Don't you daven for him?" And then Rav Scheinberg rattled off the full name of the talmid he was speaking to, along with his mother's name. "About 17 years ago, " he explained, "you came to me with an issue that was bothering you. I began davening for you then, and I haven't stopped for the last 17 years!"

Rav Scheinberg, By Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ A woman once came to Rabbi Mordechai of Chernobel, pleading for a blessing to have a child. To the amazement of the bystanders, the Rabbi, who was exceptionally kind and benevolent, said brusquely to her, "I'm sorry, I cannot help you." The woman left the room tearful and broken hearted. Noting the bewilderment of his chassidim, Rabbi Mordechai said, "Just wait a few moments, then go find the woman and bring her back here. " The chassidim did as they were told, and when the woman came back, the Rabbi asked her, "What did you do when you left here?" The woman replied, "I turned my eyes to heaven and I said, 'Dear G-d, the Rabbi refuses to help me. Now You are my only hope. Bless me that I have a child. "' Rabbi Mordechai said to the chassidim, "This woman believed that I had magical powers, and she was trusting in me rather than in G-d. When I refused her request, she placed her trust in G-d where it belongs. She will now be blessed with a child. "

Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky

❖ Rav Yechezkel Levenstein was once riding in a cab in Israel and the driver told him the following story: "Rabbi, when my friends and I finished the army, we decided to embark on a world tour. We were out in the jungles of Africa one night when one of my friends woke up screaming. We jumped up and saw a boa constrictor wrapped around him, squeezing him to death. We tried pulling the snake off, but we had no success. We didn't know what to do. He was turning blue and close to death. "Somebody finally shouted to him, 'Yigal, you're going to die, at least say Shema.' Yigal started saying Shema. As soon as he finished the first passuk, the snake released him and slithered away." The cab driver continued, "Do you know that as a result of that incident he became a baal teshuvah? Today he's religious and has a religious family. They keep kosher his wife covers her hair, and his kids all go to cheder. Rav Levenstein responded, "That's amazing." He paused for a moment and then asked suddenly, "And what about you?" "Oh, no," said the cab driver. "It didn't happen to me, it happened to him."

Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ Repentance that is motivated by fear is on a lofty level indeed; if only we would merit to repent in such a fashion! Nevertheless, such an individual must be aware that he did not repent out of love for Hashem but, rather, out of fear of the subsequent retribution. This can be compared to a legion of soldiers who were pursuing the enemy. The chase continued for many days, extending over mountains and through forests. One day, they paused to rest in the middle of a thick forest. The soldiers tied their horses to the trees, plucked some twigs, and lit a bonfire. They placed a large cauldron on the fire and cooked warm soup in order to revive themselves. When the soup was ready to be served, the soldier who was manning the lookout station appeared and, in a panic, informed the soldiers that the enemy legion was approaching. The fierce soldiers leaped onto their horses and galloped toward the enemy battalion in order to fight them. There was a coward among them who did not rush to leave the pot of soup. He helped himself to a brimming bowl and even filled up his canteen with steaming-hot soup. He then nonchalantly mounted his horse and joined his battalion. As he began galloping toward the battlefield, several drops of the boiling hot soup leaked from his canteen and splattered onto his horse. When the horse felt the scorching soup, it began to gallop out of control directly into the lines of the enemy brigade. When the enemy spotted this brazen soldier heading straight into their lines, they were gripped by terror and dread, and began to run for their lives in a display of surrender. This lone soldier had tipped the scales of the battle! His commander approached him and asked in astonishment, "I've known you for quite some time, and I am well aware that you aren't one of the bravest soldiers in the legion. So please tell me, what motivated you to display such incredible bravery by charging the enemy battalion all on your own? You deserve a medal of distinction from the king himself for such a heroic act!" "Truthfully," admitted the soldier shamefacedly, "I am not the bravest of soldiers. Rather, a small amount of scalding soup dripped on my horse, and I was not able to control it as it stampeded into the enemy camp..." "If that is so," responded the commander, "You do not deserve the honor and praise — your horse does! " The same thing applies to repentance. One who repents out of fear should know precisely why he repented, it was from his "horse", not him.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ When Rav Yitzchok Hutner was sitting shivah for his wife, two giants of mussar, R' Meir Chodosh and R' Shlomo Wolbe, came to console him at the same time. The three rabbanim began discussing the educational approach of the Alter of Slabodka, and R' Hutner recalled the prodigious and often scathing rebuke that the Alter frequently leveled at him. Upon hearing his description, R' Wolbe turned to R' Meir Chodosh and said, "Is it possible to teach talmidim in our generation in the same way that the Alter dealt with his own talmidim? It seems to me that bachurim today wouldn't be capable of dealing with this type of tochachah. It would simply cause them to rebel or become broken!" R' Meir replied, "If our talmidim felt that their rebbeim loved them as profoundly as the Alter loved us, they would be able to accept even the level of powerful rebuke that we received from the Alter." R' Hutner then shared a personal anecdote: "One day, I decided that I could no longer endure the Alter's harsh censure, and I resolved to leave the yeshivah. However, I had derech eretz," he added, "and I forced myself to go to his home first and inform him that I was leaving. The rebbetzin answered the door and asked for my name. "'Yitzchok Varshever,' I replied. R' Hutner was known by this name because he came from Warsaw. "'Oh!' the Rebbetzin exclaimed. 'So you are the talmid for whom my husband is constantly fasting and davening!' "When I heard that," R' Hutner concluded, "I immediately changed my mind. I informed the Rebbetzin that I no longer needed to see the Alter, and I turned around and went back to the yeshivah."

From Moments Of Greatness By R' Yitzchok Hissiger

❖ Rebbetzin Levin, wife of R' Aryeh Levin, the beloved "Tzaddik of Jerusalem," was a great lady in her own right. She was renowned for her piety, generosity, and modesty. She once said that in all her life she was jealous of only one person. The "victim" of her jealousy was the wife of a once-wealthy man who lost his fortune. He was forced to become a menial construction laborer, a difficult job for which he was ill-suited physically. His self-respect was damaged at work and he would come home physically and emotionally worn. Every day, his wife would dress in her best clothing and go out to greet him with a smile and a snack. "Of such a wise and sensitive woman I am jealous."

Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Binyomin Ginsberg relates the following story: In 2012, I was invited by one of the Jewish community schools in Tucson, Arizona to speak to their students. One of the families there had several children in the school and wished to receive some guidance as to how they could best provide an authentic Jewish education for their children. When I arrived in the school one morning, I was approached by the principal who asked if I could address the students. He suggested that with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur approaching, it would be beneficial for the students to hear about the importance of davening. I agreed. I later entered the auditorium with my mind set on very straightforwardly talking about the concept of tefillah. But, as I soon discovered, I would have to slightly modify my initial plan and choose a different method of engaging the children. So I decided on the following. "I am a little frustrated," I told the kids. "There is a gentleman who has been in jail for more than twenty-five years. His name is Jonathan Pollard. Yet there is one person who can wake up in the morning and set him free. And that is the President of the United States. So let me tell you what I am going to do. I will call the White House and ask the President to release him." I took out my cell phone, put it on speaker and began dialing the number of the White House. I only got as far as the operator. "Good morning, White House, how can we help you?" "I would like to speak to President Obama," I said. "He is not available," spat back the operator. "When will he be available?" I prodded. "He is not available for private calls." "I am here," I continued to say, "with close to two hundred of his relatives. I need no more than thirty seconds of the President's precious time. Can you please let me know when I can call back?" "He will not be available," it repeated. By now, I realized that I was not making great progress, so I figured I would go a step further. "Can I please speak to your supervisor?" I asked. Surprisingly, I was let through to the supervisor. "Hello, sir, what can I help you with?" "I would like to speak to the President," I asked. "He is not available now." "Can I give you a message to relay to him?" "Well," she said, "I don't have access to the President." "Where are you now?" I asked. "In the White House." When she said this, I was left a bit confused. "You cannot just go to the Oval Office and let him know I would like thirty seconds of his time?" "Sir," she replied, "I have worked under nine presidents, and not once have I ever seen any of them." At

this point, I knew I needed to pitch a good reason for getting through to him. "I have a very important message I need to tell him," I said." "We have a fax line," the lady replied, "and you can write out your comments and fax it in." "Okay," I said, "and then the President will get it?" "No," came the reply again. "The way it works is that we record a tally of all the comments we receive, and if we accumulate at least five thousand comments about a particular issue, somebody slips a piece of paper to the President and informs him that there were so many comments about such-and-such an issue." As I heard this, I knew I wasn't going to get too far in my goal of reaching the President. I then turned straight towards the room full of students and said, "Look at this! We could not get even thirty seconds with the President. We couldn't even give him a piece of paper. There is no communication between us and our leader. But happens between Hashem and us. We have the amazing gift of tefillah. We have the opportunity twenty-four hours a day plus three special times throughout the day to directly talk to Hashem without ever getting a busy signal. Where else can you find that type of relationship where someone is always available and ready to listen? How fortunate are we.

Living in His Image Contemporary Torah Anthology

❖ An individual was in desperate need of a favor from a friend of his. His friend enjoyed close ties with the government, and he needed him to speak favorably on his behalf. He therefore expended the effort to travel to his home, and he waited for nearly an hour until his friend returned from his business. When the friend arrived, he pleaded with him to fulfill his request, and reiterated several times just how important this matter was to him. When the friend finally conceded to the request, the man offered him heartfelt thanks and departed. The friend carried out what had been requested of him, performing the favor for his longtime friend. One day, he was walking in the street and met a different man who was an old acquaintance of his. "Please do me a favor," requested the man, "and speak to the government on my behalf regarding a certain issue." The man agreed to perform the favor, but this time, he forgot the matter entirely and did not fulfill the request. The difference between the first instance and the second, noted the Dubno Maggid, is as follows: The first individual traveled a great distance and spared no effort to journey to his friend. Additionally, when he discovered that his friend was not home, he waited for him to arrive. The second individual, however, happened to encounter the man by chance and did not appear to have exerted any effort whatsoever to arrange an audience with him. This is why the man with the close ties to the kingdom likewise did not put forth any effort. Our prayers are altogether different, noted the Dubno Maggid, when they are invested with effort and not simply uttered by way of habit.

Jewish Parables- A Mashal for Every Occasion, By Rabbi Yisroel Bronstein, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In Slutsk, day Rabbi Asher Sandomirsky was arrested by the Bolshevics for teaching Torah. He was brought to trial together Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, who was arrested after a search in his house revealed an incriminating document, a postal check for a donation to the yeshivah. As the first trial for the crime of teaching Torah, it was a showcase trial, covered by the worldwide press. Even the American papers wrote about it in detail, and in one paper it was featured as a front-page story.' The trial went on for five days, a crowd of most of the town's Jews filling the courtroom, on one occasion the shamash, the attendant of the tailors', shul, fainted in fear under cross examination. Rav Asher boldly pointed out that if the shamash should die of heart failure, public opinion would not favor the Communist state. Only then did the shamash get medical care. The court was in session all day. As the sun sank towards the horizon, Rav Asher stood up fearlessly and started reciting Minchah loudly deliberately drawing everyone's attention. Rav Isser Zalman stood with him, and all the Jews present joined them in prayer! This daring step had unexpected results. The publicity the trial received, including this incident, apparently daunted the government. To everyone's surprise the prisoners were released with strict warnings. Half a year later, however, the government again laid its evil hand on Rav Asher and this second trial he received a jail sentence of five months, after which he was expelled from Slutzk.

Path to Greatness by Rabbi Asher Bergman, Published by Feldheim, p. 167

❖ From the very beginning, the Brisker Rav's (Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik's) parents, the great R. Chaim and Lifsha, nurtured their precious child with Torah and Shamayim, directing him in the path of the righteous from his very first steps. Little Velvele's brilliant potential was evident at a young age, little wonder, since his mother had begun his education early. "Even before he was weaned, she trained him to thank Hashem for the bounty he received, instructing him to make a blessing before nursing.

The Brisker Rav, By Rabbi Shimon Yosef Meller, p. 77

❖ A wealthy friend of the family, Reb Isaac Nussbaum of Halberstadt, Germany, urged Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld to allow him to build a spacious, beautiful home fit for the Rav, atop one of the structures in Battei Machseh. R' Chaim thanked him for his generous offer and led him to the window of his modest dwelling. "Look out the window, Mr. Nussbaum," said R' Chaim wistfully. "See how the house of G-d, our Beis HaMikdash, lies in ruin, its site occupied by Arabs. Can you really want to build a mansion for me? It is enough for the servant to be like his master. As long as the palace of the King is destroyed, this simple dwelling will suffice..." Mr. Nussbaum then asked to provide R' Chaim with a car and driver for the many trips he took for various mitzvos, but R' Chaim politely declined this offer as well.

Guardian of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 162

❖ 8 year old Juan Diego lived in an orphanage in Peru. He had no family. When he saw a beautiful family he pined for a family of his own. The Peruvians had a custom that they never opened people's letters. A letter at the post office was addressed simply to God. No one at the post office knew who to open it. Each manager passed it up. Finally it got passed to the prime minister of Peru, Mr. Espinoza. The letter said dear G-d, I live in an orphanage. I am 8 years old. I want a family very badly. You are the only one who can help me. The prime minister was touched and went with his wife to meet the boy. They decided to adopt him. This teaches "karov lekol asher yikrau vemes."

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 181

❖ Kabbalos were treated as nothing less than vows. Once in the middle of davening, the Alter of Kelm (Reb Simcha Zissel Ziv) suddenly got up from his place, went to the back of the beis medrash to look into a siddur (prayerbook), and then returned to his place. Only later did his talmidim realize what had happened. One of the Alter's kabbalos that year was to daven out of Siddur. A word had become torn in his own siddur, and rather than recite that word by heart, he had picked up another siddur to read the missing word."

Rav Dessler, By Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 62

❖ Later in life, in an address to thousands who assembled at special events organized by Shas on Chol HaMoed, Rav Ovadia Yosef recounted that Napoleon would gather young troops and say, "Is there anyone in this group who does not dream of being a general one day? If there's even one of you who doesn't harbor such aspirations, please leave. If you want to accomplish anything, you must dream of reaching the top. " "If you don't dream of being a general in Torah, " Harav Ovadia would conclude, "then you'll never be able to achieve any success."

Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ On a visit to Eretz Yisroel, Reb Leizer Geltzhaler led a group of talmidim to the kivrei tzaddikim in the north. When they reached the cemetery, the bachurim piled off the bus excitedly, eager to daven at the holy sites. One bachur, a kohein, was forced to remain on the bus, and before stepping off to join the others Reb Leizer turned to him. "I want to you to know that now you're sitting here all alone, left behind. But when Moshiach comes, you're going to be the one walking inside to do the avodah and we're going to be the ones left behind, looking on with envy."

Reb Laizer, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published by Judaica Press

❖ Yehudis Spero had a brother who was killed by Lebanese troops in the Lebanon war. She named her son Daniel after her brother who was killed, and davened that no Jewish blood should ever have to be killed in Eretz Yisrael. Daniel joined the army himself. One Friday night, Yehudis had severe back pain and could not sleep. All of a sudden, she felt a strong premonition that one of her children was in danger, and she got up to recite Tehillim. She said Tehillim at 3:30 AM for a while then fell asleep. After Shabbos Daniel called and said he almost died. He was patrolling in Gaza and terrorists tossed a grenade at their feet, then another one. It was sparking. They expected it to go off but it was a dud. When mother asked what time it was, it was at 3:30 — the same time she said Tehillim.

Touched By a Story, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 176

❖ When Rav Meir Chadash, zt"l, the venerable mashgiach of the Chevron Yeshivah, was fifteen years old, he was stopped on the street by some Russian soldiers who demanded to see his papers. Unfortunately, he had none. He was immediately taken to a courtyard and put up against the wall to face the firing squad. He began to say Shema Yisrael. The officer in charge felled at him to stand up straight. His legs were shaking so much that he couldn't stand up. The officer continued hollering at him to stand up straight, but he still could not do it. After repeated shouting, the window in a nearby building suddenly opened. A Russian general started yelling at the officer that the ruckus was waking him up from his nap and he was going to court-martial all those soldiers. The soldiers and their commanding officer immediately scattered, and Reb Meir was saved.

Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The Alter of Kelm, Reb Simchah Zissel Ziv was among the great talmidim of Reb Yisroel Salanter, the father of the Mussar movement. He had a hanhaga which is reflected in his letters to his son. When he heard an insight that inspired him he would not share it with anyone. He would not tell it over even to his closest talmidim. Only after an extended time which could be as long as a year or two, would he share it with others. I had the good fortune to learn about the Alter's hanhaga from my Rebbe, Reb Mendel Kaplan z"l. He explained the reason for this. When you hear an inspiring insight which truly touches you in a profound way, it acts upon you in the same way a pressure cooker acts upon the food that is placed inside it. The pressure cooker impacts the food inside by creating pressure. Inside the pot great pressure is impressed on that food and it cooks in a most remarkable way. The moment you release the pressure, the impact is lost. In a similar vein, if a thought impacts you in a profound way, do not release it. Let it sit within you. It will continue to impact you in many more ways. The power of a thought can be profound if you just let it percolate. Once this thought is shared, it loses its pressure. Although other people may appreciate it, the power of the thought will be lost. The best time to share it with others is once you find that the thought is no longer providing its original inspiration. At that point sharing it helps revive the original inspiration.

Heard from Reb Mendel by Paysach Diskind

❖ The local rabbi gave a mussar shmooze between Minchah and Maariv daily. One day he began exhorting his congregants to greater devotions. "We need to be more focused on Hashem," he began. "We need to think about Hashem. We need to bring Hashem into our lives. We need to concentrate on Hashem." Losing patience, one of the old men in the back blurted out, "Come on, come on, forget about Hashem already. Let's start davening."

Impact, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ Reb Meir Pantel and Yosef Friedenson were talking with Rav Aharon Kotler about some important matter. Suddenly Rav Aharon stood up and apologized for not being able to talk with them any longer. He explained that he had to immediately attend an urgent matter elsewhere. Rav Aharon was on edge. It was obvious that he was anxious and in a big rush. Then the Rebbetzin reminded him that he won't have time to daven Minchah later and must pray now. Well that

Shemoneh Esrei took the Rosh Yeshivah 45 minutes.

The Living Mishnas Reb Aharon, By Rabbi Yitzchak Dershowitz, Published by Feldheim

❖ Coming out of the Mikveh, one of the disciples of Reb Dov Ber of Mezritch encountered a friend who addressed him in these words: "Brother, whatever will come of us, with all our sins?" "It's not the sins that worry me," said the other. "For those, there's something called teshuvah. But whatever will be with our mitzvos? How well are we serving our King.'?."

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, p. 72

❖ Why do we fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah?" a bachur asked Rav Tendler. "It makes it very hard to learn." "Do you fast on Yom Kippur? "Yes, but davening is different, it's not like learning." "If your davening is not like your learning, then it's not a davening, either," Rebbi responded.

I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 353

❖ The Brisker Rav's (Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik's) son, R. Meir, once expressed to him his distress at having forgotten to recite Ya'aleh V'Yavvo in his prayers on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. The Brisker Rav's face lit up. "You have gained the chance to say seven more berachos!"

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, by Rabbi Shimon Yosef Meller, p. 461

❖ A yeshivah bochur once went to Rav Shach, zt"l, to ask him if there was some leniency he could rely on in order to shower during this mourning period. Rav Shach said, "Maybe there is and maybe there isn't. But one thing I do know. No one ever asked me this question when they were sitting shiva."

Impact, Vol. 4, By Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ "When I took the farher in eighth grade, " confided a close talmid, "I made a mistake on the first question. I was so nervous and overwhelmed that I began to cry. Rav Tendler came around the desk, and held my hand. 'I wish that I too would cry after I made just one mistake,' he said."

I Am Your Servant, by Rabbi Akiva Tendler, p. 134

❖ Following the Yom Kippur War, the Gerrer Rebbe was besieged by visiting delegations from all over the world. He detested discussions on the political and military situation. To all queries he had one answer, "We must pray." Once a distinguished American Rabbi asked him, "What do you say about the current situation?" Replied the Rebbe: "I say Tehillim."

The Torah Personality, By Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Published by Mesorah Publications

❖ Three years before his passing, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach remarked that a day on which he was able to concentrate properly (by his standards) on the words of the three daily Shemoneh Esres was to him "like a Yom Tov."

5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

SEDER NINE • SECTION THREE: MITZVOS OF THE MIND AND HEART

AVODAH: SERVICE OF THE HEART & SANCTUARY

Internal Worship, The Sanctuary, Tefillah, Brachos, and Teshuvah

OVERVIEW

The next category of mitzvos among the Edifying Mitzvos is the category of Avodah. This is the category of Avodah shebalev, or inner worship. These mitzvos include mitzvos of prayer and brachos.

Contrary to what many people believe, prayer isn't simply about asking the Almighty for things. In fact, much of our prayers are not requests at all. The Maharal teaches us that the word tefillah, comes from the world hispallel which means to judge oneself. Prayer's role is to be an introspection. It is a time to look inwardly, determine what level you are on, and consequently make new commitments for the future.

Being constantly involved with the material world tends to pull us down. We forget that our purpose is to come close to the Almighty. We don't see the Almighty, and as the saying goes, "Out of sight is out of mind". Prayer's role is to pull us out of the monotonous grind of struggling with the physical world, and to reorient us with the true purpose of our life. Prayer contains praises of the Almighty which are designed to remind us of the Almighty's majestic greatness. It contains our expressions of gratitude for all of the beneficence that the Almighty has showered upon us, which serves to remind us where our blessings have come from. Prayer contains a reaffirmation of the purpose of our lives as individuals and as a part of Klal Yisrael. (Krias Shma). These are to cause us to introspect, to judge ourselves based on these standards, and to make fresh commitments for the future based on the inspiration that we have received.

Even the parts of prayer that do ask the Almighty for things are meant to engender introspection and a concomitant uplifting inspiration. When we turn to the Almighty for assistance, we express our awareness that we are utterly dependent upon the Almighty for our needs, and that He is the true Master of the world, and consequently we can only receive His blessing to the degree that we are close to Him.

In addition to all of the above, when we pray, we have the opportunity to speak directly and intimately to the most majestic and powerful Being in the universe. When we daven properly we feel a tremendous feeling of closeness and love for the Almighty. That feeling of closeness and love for the Almighty that we develop through prayer charges us and energizes us to fulfill His will out of love.

Hence, the result of a focused and passionate prayer should be a fresh inspiration about the Almighty's greatness, our mission in this world, our dependence upon the Almighty for our needs, and the awareness that we will be deserving of the blessing that we need from the Almighty to the degree that we are close to Him. A focused and passionate prayer rewards us with a powerful drive to strive towards G-dliness.

Brachos have a very similar effect. When we make a berachah on a fruit, what we are expressing is far more than a simple thank you. We are expressing our awareness that this food came from the Almighty and that He has given it to us exclusively for us to use as a tool to come close to Him. So when we make a berachah and express that this food came from the Almighty, we are also reminded of the food's purpose. We remind ourselves that we aren't eating simply to satisfy our lusts. We are eating rather to have the strength and healthy vitality to live a life of closeness to the Almighty.

Parenthetically, when we eat food with the awareness that we are using it as a tool to be healthy in order to achieve closeness to the Almighty, we elevate and sanctify the food. Not only do we elevate the food itself, but we also elevate all that was involved in the growth and production of that food.

Another important section of mitzvos in this category are the mitzvos of self reflection and repentance. Teshuvah, to return to ones true self, is a mitzvah very similar to tefillah. We are required to take time every day to reflect on whether our lives are aligned with the standards that we truly want. If we find a disparity between the way we are living and the way we truly should live, we have a mitzvah to try our best to correct course, and we are promised by Hashem that we will receive his loving assistance. As our Sages say, "Haba letaher mesayin oso", one who wishes to purify himself, is aided by Hashem.

In short, this category of mitzvos gives us a boost of inspiration by means of redirecting our minds and our hearts to the Basis of our life and the purpose of our life.

BEIS HAMIKDASH: THE SANCTUARY OF DIVINE INSPIRATION

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all deal with relating to the Beis HaMikdash, the sanctuary that served to inspire us to perfect our character and come close to Hashem

1. To Revere the Temple and Synagogue

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 18

As the Torah says, and reverence My sanctuary (Vayikra 19:30, Parshas Kedoshim 26,2, Parshas Behar)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is meant by the term sanctuary?
- How are we to express reverence for the sanctuary?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Our synagogues (batei knesses) and study halls (batei midrash) are designated as "miniature sanctuaries" (mikdash me'at), as Scripture states: "Yet I have been to them as a miniature sanctuary in the countries where they have arrived" (Yechezkel 11:16).

We are obligated to conduct ourselves within them with awe and solemn dignity, and we must scrupulously refrain within their walls from:

Frivolous laughter, mockery, or lightheaded levity (kalus rosh);

Idle chatter and mundane conversation (sichas chullin);

Conducting commercial transactions, personal accounting, or mundane financial calculations;

And sleeping within their sanctuaries, which is strictly forbidden.

The sanctity of these holy spaces is exceedingly profound. This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Beis HaMikdash was a place where we could be sanctified and elevated by the sanctifying influence of Hashem's presence. This would inspire us and elevate us to greater commitment to becoming G-dly, and perfecting our character. Because we don't have the Beis HaMikdash today, our synagogues serve as its most approximate replacement. We are able to absorb the sanctity and elevating influence of a sanctuary to the degree that we revere and respect its holiness.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM

When a person is moved in awe by the splendor of the Mikdash, that will inspire him to observe the rest of the Torah.

ABARBANEL

We should stand in awe of the presence of the Shechinah that is in the Mikdash.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:5)

Korbanos are necessary for the daily renewal of the world. Chazal who set up the tefillah arranged the tefillah to replace the korbanos.

SFAS EMES

• The most basic meaning of Morah Mikdash follows from the purpose of the Mikdash itself: The Sfas Emes explains that the words "Sanctuary" (Mikdash) and "And I shall dwell" (ve-shachanti) describe two stages. First the place must become separated and sanctified. Then it becomes capable of receiving a revelation of Hashem's presence. The Mikdash is therefore a sacred place (makom) that has been prepared for the revelation of His blessed glory (hisgalus kevodo yisbarach). Morah Mikdash is the proper human response to that reality. A person behaves differently because he is standing in a place whose entire purpose is the indwelling of the Divine Presence (hashra'as ha-Shechinah). It is a sacred place (makom) that Klal Yisrael has separated for avodas Hashem. Its kedushah requires a different form of conduct because its purpose is different (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5643).

• The Sfas Emes places the mitzvah within the framework of world (olam), time and the yearly cycle (shanah), soul (nefesh): place, time, and person. He sees these three dimensions in the pesukim of Parshas Kedoshim. In soul (nefesh), the Torah commands forms of yirah and respect toward people through such mitzvos as: "Every person shall revere his mother and his father." In time and the yearly cycle (shanah), sacred time is established through "My Sabbaths you shall guard," and in world (olam), sacred space is established through "and you shall revere My Sanctuary" (u-Mikdashi tira'u). The mitzvah therefore teaches that sacred place (makom) itself can possess kedushah. There is such a thing as holy place (makom kadosh). The Beis HaMikdash is the fullest expression of this principle, and every Mikdash Me'at preserves a smaller version of it (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5651).

• The Sfas Emes gives an especially striking explanation of why the Torah uses the language of reverent awe (yirah) for both parents and the Mikdash. He writes: Parents give the person his physical life. Shabbos and the Mikdash give him access to a higher life, the illumination of the neshamah. The Sfas Emes describes the effect of coming to the Mikdash: "the illumination of the soul rests upon them." The sacred place (makom) itself assists the Jew in recovering a spiritual consciousness that is easily hidden during ordinary life. The Mikdash sanctifies sacred place (makom) and brings an analogous illumination upon those who enter. Morah Mikdash is therefore related to the yirah owed to something through which one receives his very life (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5647).

• The Sfas Emes defines the very word Sanctuary (Mikdash): "sanctified in the sense of holy separation and distinction." Kedushah begins with separation. The physical world tends to flatten distinctions. A person can gradually relate to every place in the same way and bring the same speech, behavior, habits, and concerns everywhere. The Mikdash teaches that there are boundaries within Creation. There is ordinary weekday (chol), and there is holiness (kodesh). Morah Mikdash protects that boundary. The halachos governing behavior in a holy place (makom kadosh) therefore express something deeper than respect for an institution. This distinction is itself part of the Torah's education in kedushah. A person learns that holiness becomes possible when he is capable of saying: this place, this time, this action, or this part of life is dedicated differently (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5643).

• The Torah says: "And I shall dwell within them" (ve-shachanti be-socham). Chazal and the Sfas Emes emphasize that it does not say "within it" (be-socho), within the building, but "within them" (be-socham), within Bnei Yisrael. The Sfas Emes explains that the external Mikdash therefore points toward an inner Mikdash. The physical sacred place (makom) teaches the person what he himself can become: a spiritual vessel (kli) for the Shechinah. This gives Morah Mikdash an inward consequence. The person who learns to honor sacred space begins to understand that his own heart, mind, body, speech, and actions also contain areas that must be protected from ordinary weekday (chol). The human being (ha-adam) is meant to become a personal sanctuary. Thus the Torah's command to build a Mikdash ultimately returns to the person himself: "And I shall dwell within them" (ve-shachanti be-socham) (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5649).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

▪ Discuss the purpose of the Beis HaMikdash

▪ Discuss why we yearn for it

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A new residential development in Israel prepared to construct its very first communal synagogue. Some residents argued that the building should be situated in the exact geometric center of the neighborhood so walking distance would be equal for all residents. Other residents urged that it be placed at the outer boundary of the neighborhood so that Jews from an adjacent town with no synagogue could also walk and pray. Who is correct?

Answer: It seems that it is best to put it at the edge of the neighborhood.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 260

An apartment building in Israel contained an unoccupied ground-floor apartment. Many residents wished to purchase the unit and convert it into a neighborhood synagogue. However, several tenants living directly above the unit objected, arguing that constant pedestrian traffic, children running in the stairwell, and loud prayers would shatter their domestic quiet. Can the objecting tenants legally prevent the conversion of the apartment into a synagogue?

Answer: Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l ruled to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein that upstairs neighbors in a residential apartment building have a valid halachic right to object to converting the ground-floor apartment beneath them into a formal synagogue (beis ha-knesses), both because living directly above a synagogue imposes strict halachic restrictions on the upstairs bedrooms (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 151:12) and because of the heavy foot traffic of crowds entering the

building.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Avodah Zarah, p. 206

It was during the period when Arab terrorists were shooting rockets into Jewish civilian populations. Chaim was in a shul one day. The davening was completed, and all the attendees filed out. Suddenly, after everyone was out of the building, a terrorist rocket slammed into the roof of the building. The entire roof caved in, and fire spread throughout the building. Miraculously, the building was completely empty, and no one was hurt at all. It was a modern-day miracle. In a few months, the shul was about to complete its repair. One of the walls was blackened from the fire and the explosion. Chaim had an idea. He suggested to the president of the shul that they leave one wall, or at least part of the wall, charred or burned to remember the miracle. They could put up a plaque on top of the burned wall that was left there as a memorial for the attack and its miracle. The president liked the idea but suggested that perhaps it was not respectful to have a burned, charred, blackened wall as part of the shul. Perhaps they should consider doing something else to remember the miracle, like an annual seudas hoda'ah (meal to offer thanksgiving). They brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Is it respectful to have a charred wall on a shul to remember the miracle?

Answer: Regarding the question about the burned wall, Rav Zilberstein said that it would be better not to remember the miracle with something that is not respectful to the shul. In shul, we don't even do the regular zecher lachurban of leaving an amah unplastered. Therefore it would be best to remember the miracle with a Seudas Hoda'ah.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 58

A very small community had 10 men for the minyan but could not afford a Sefer Torah yet. They wanted to know if they should build an Aron in order for the shul to have the traditional appearance with an Aron and a Shulchan. Also, should they open up the Aron during parts of davening even though they don't have a scroll?

Answer: They don't have to have the Aron.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 98

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ In most shuls they sell the aliyos for chasan Torah and chasan Bereishis, but in Kelm they would sell the zechus to clean the beis medrash. That was the biggest kibud. Next was the zechus to turn on the heater, then to light the candles. The Alter of Kelm bought the kibud of getting the washing cup and bucket for the kohanim to use. A young man new to the yeshivah, named Yerucham saw the Alter carrying the bucket and cup. He ran to the Alter to take it from him. The Alter said gently, "Young man, this is a great honor that I paid a lot of money for. Please don't take it away from me." That made a tremendous impression on him. That young man grew up to become Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the revered Mashgiach of Mir."

Touched by a Story, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 138

❖ Rav Manis Mandel was the beloved principal of Yeshivah of Brooklyn (YOB) and was known as a special tzadik. A student of Rav Mandel related the following story. When I came to the school, the black janitor, Teddy, was an old man and did very little other than mop up an occasional spill. But Rav Mandel refused to let him go. Rabbi Mandel warned us, "If anyone does anything or says anything that upsets Teddy, she will be in very big trouble". One day, Rabbi Mandel came into our classroom, picked up some papers off the floor, and said, "If necessary, I will be the one to pick up the papers on the

floor so that our mikdash me'at will be clean. " And then he added, "You think that Teddy is here to clean up after you? The truth is Teddy is here for you to create a kiddush Hashem before him by cleaning up after yourselves to make it easier for him to do his job."

From Rabbi Manis Mandel, A Legendary Mechanech and Tzadik. By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

A. TO YEARN FOR THE REDEMPTION

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-34

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Hashem commanded us through His holy prophets to yearn and actively look forward each and every day to the ultimate redemption of Klal Yisroel through the coming of Moshiach. This is reflected in the prophecy of Tzefanyah: "Therefore wait for Me, says Hashem" (Tzefanyah 3:8), and likewise in the prophecy of Chabakuk: "Though he tarry, wait for him, for he will surely come; he will not delay" (Chabakuk 2:3). The Midrash explains that these prophetic exhortations refer directly to our daily obligation to anticipate the arrival of Moshiach and the restoration of divine kingship.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Eliyahu HaNavi standing at the entrance to the cave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. After asking whether he would merit the World to Come, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked Eliyahu: 'When will the Mashiach come?' Eliyahu replied: 'Go and ask him yourself!' 'And where is he sitting?' 'At the gates of the city of Rome!' 'And by what sign shall I recognize him?' Eliyahu answered: 'He sits among the poor people who suffer from sores; all the other poor people untie all their bandages at once, clean their wounds, and then tie them all back up again, whereas Mashiach unties only one bandage at a time and immediately wraps it back up before untying the next, saying to himself: Perhaps I will be summoned to redeem Israel at this very second, and I must not be delayed by even a moment!' Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went to the gates of Rome, found Mashiach just as Eliyahu had described, and greeted him: 'Peace be upon you, my master and teacher!' Mashiach replied: 'Peace be upon you, son of Levi!' Rabbi Yehoshua asked him: 'When will the Master come?' Mashiach answered: 'Today!' Later, Rabbi Yehoshua returned to Eliyahu and said: 'He did not tell me the truth — he told me he was coming today, and yet he has not come!' Eliyahu smiled and explained: 'This is what he meant when he said Today — as the verse says (Tehillim 95:7): Today, if you will only listen to His voice (HaYom im b'kolo tishma'u)!'

Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 98a (195:15-17)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The following story is told of how the Beis Ha Levi agreed to accept the position of Rav in Brisk: When they first sent R. Yosef Dov a ksav rabbanus, he did not want to accept it and gave all sorts of excuses for his negative answer. The heads of the community of Brisk begged him to come, trying a number of different approaches, but he refused, until finally, one of them got up and said with passion, "Rebbe, twenty five thousand Jews are sitting and waiting for you in Brisk! How can you turn them away empty-handed?" This plea made such an impression on the Beis HaLevi that he accepted the position on

the spot. When this story reached the ears of the holy Chofetz Chaim in Radin, he began to cry, saying, "If only Klal Yisrael await the Mashiach like those twenty-five thousand Jews R. Yoshe Ber, he would come immediately. He would not turn them away empty-handed. But, unfortunately, they are just not awaiting him as they should."

The Brisker Rav, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim, p. 16

B. TO MOURN THE TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-19

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinic commandment to actively mourn the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and the exile of the Shechinah (Divine Presence), as Scripture proclaims: "If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill; let my tongue adhere to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not elevate Yerushalayim above my highest joy" (Tehillim 137:5–6). Chazal explain that this requires both internal remembrance within the heart and verbal expression with the mouth. Furthermore, one should lift his voice in heartfelt yearning for its restoration, as Scripture states: "Hark, your watchmen raise their voice, together they sing for joy, for eye to eye they shall see when Hashem returns to Tzion" (Yeshayahu 52:8).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai escaped from besieged Jerusalem and came before the Roman general Vespasian, he greeted him: 'Peace upon you, O King! Peace upon you, O King!' Vespasian said: 'You are liable to two death sentences — first, because I am not a king and you mock me; and second, if I am a king, why did you not come to me until now?' Rabban Yochanan replied: 'In truth you ARE a king — for if you were not a king, Jerusalem would never be delivered into your hand, since the prophet Yeshayahu foretold (10:34): And the Lebanon (the Temple) shall fall only by a Mighty One (a king)!' Just as they were speaking, a breathless imperial courier arrived from Rome and announced to Vespasian: 'Arise! Caesar has died in Rome, and the Roman Senate has proclaimed you the new Emperor!' Vespasian had just put on one boot, and when he tried to pull on his second boot, his foot swelled up with joy so that the boot wouldn't fit! Rabban Yochanan smiled and explained: 'Do not worry! Scripture teaches (Mishlei 15:30): Good news makes the bones fat! And what is the remedy? Let someone whom you dislike pass before you, for it is also written (Mishlei 17:22): A broken spirit dries up the bones!' Vespasian did so, and his boot slid right on. Amazed by Rabban Yochanan's wisdom, Vespasian told him: 'I am departing for Rome, but ask of me something that I may grant you!' Rabban Yochanan uttered the immortal words that saved Judaism: 'Give me Yavneh and its Sages, the royal chain of Rabban Gamliel, and physicians to heal Rabbi Tzadok!'

Talmud Bavli, Gittin 56a–56b (112:1–5)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Years later, Reb Velvel was sitting at the table in his home in Yerushalayim when the subject of the closing of the yeshivah came up. His expression became melancholy, and he was thrown back sixty years, recalling the streets of Samorgon and Vilna and the Volozhinka River. "It was like Tishah B'Av," he told his family, describing those moments. His mind was far from Press Street in Yerushalayim. "The yeshivah closed because it had to close," he said. That was all he said, and those listening were at a loss to understand what he meant. They knew well that in the past, he had always spoken of the closure as something akin to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Now, it seemed from his words that the silencing of the kol Torah in the "Mother of Yeshivos" was good and right. What could he mean? Seeing the looks of wonder around him, Reb

Velvel explained: "It is told that when my ancestor, Rav Chaim of Volozhin, laid the foundation stone for the building of the yeshivah, a river of tears poured down his cheeks. Those present said that it wouldn't even be necessary to mix water into the cement, as the rav's tears would suffice. Why did he cry so? He should have been full of joy at the occasion of founding this great home of Torah and yiras Shamayim. It is clear," continued the Griz, "that he felt this was the best time to pour out his heart in prayer for the success of the holy yeshivah, his life's project. Everyone knows that the Yeshivah of Volozhin was the beginning of a great movement. The rest of the yeshivos were started either by talmidim of Volozhin or by those who were inspired by its example. The great surge of Torah in and around Lithuania was due to what happened in Volozhin, and without it, Torah would have been in danger, chas v'shalom, of being forgotten. Therefore, it was certainly important to pray for the success of the yeshivah, but even more so, it was necessary to pray that the yeshivah would close if ever the time came when circumstances required it." Over the course of the years, many changes befell Klal Yisrael, and the Enlightenment, which had begun in Germany, spread little by little. In the end, it even penetrated the bastions of Torah; the ideas of the Maskilim found a foothold even in Yeshivas Eitz Chaim of Volozhin. There were a number of talmidim there who were touched by this ideological plague, and they were the source of terrible aggravation to the gaon, the Netziv. In the end, it was better for the yeshivah to close than to remain open while these upstarts were threatening to destroy the integrity of the institution. As difficult as it had been to establish such a great and lofty yeshivah, how much more difficult was it to close the Yeshivah of Volozhin? Abundant prayers and great merits were necessary to open and maintain the yeshivah, but even more prayers and merits were needed to close it. "Who knows," concluded the Griz, "if that was what the Zeide, Rav Chaim of Volozhin, was weeping about—should the day ever come when the yeshivah must close, may there be the siyata dishmaya that would indeed enable it to close."

From The Brisker Rav, by R' Shimon Yosef Meller, published by Feldheim

❖ When Yeshivat Porat Yosef was being built in the Old City, near the home of Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl, much thought and discussion went into the planning. Naturally, among the many considerations, there was one particular weighty concern: what the neighbors would say. In those days, one could look out the window of Rav Nebenzahl's home and see the Kosel, the place from which the Shechinah has never budged and to which all of Klal Yisrael looks. One option suggested for building the yeshivah would completely block the Kosel from his view. Those involved in the building project imagined that Rav Nebenzahl would request that they choose a different option so that the yeshivah building would not block his view of the Kosel. To their surprise, he was actually in favor of the plan that would block the Kosel from his view. "I prefer to see a mikdash me'at built in all its glory, full of people learning Torah, than to look at the results of the terrible destruction of the Beis HaMikdash." When he said this, it was clear to them how deeply the anguish of the Churban, the long galus, and the pain of the Shechinah touched his heart.

From At His Table, Published by Tfutza Publications

C. TO WAKE UP EARLY TO PRAY FOR ITS RETURN

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-25

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One should arise early in the watches of the night or at dawn to pour out supplication before Hashem for the restoration of the Beis HaMikdash and the salvation of Klal Yisroel, as Scripture urges: "Arise, cry out in the night... pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord; lift up your hands toward Him for the life of your young children" (Eichah 2:19).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Chanan HaNechba ('Chanan the Hidden') was the son of the daughter of Choni the Circle-Maker. Whenever the world desperately needed rain, the Sages would send the little schoolchildren from the Torah school to him. The children would surround him, tug at the hem of his cloak, and cry out to him: 'Abba, Abba, give us rain! (Father, Father, give us rain!)' Thereupon Chanan would lift his eyes to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and pray: 'Master of the Universe! Do it for the sake of these innocent little children, who cannot yet tell the difference between the Father Who truly gives rain and the father who cannot give rain!' And immediately the rains would fall.

Talmud Bavli, Taanis 23b (46:8)

D. UNTIL IT IS REBUILT, NOT TO FILL YOUR MOUTH WITH LAUGHTER

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-20

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages have forbidden a person from filling his mouth with unbridled laughter in this world so long as the Beis HaMikdash remains in ruins (Talmud Bavli, Berachos 31a). This is derived from the verse: "Then our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing" (Tehillim 126:2) — indicating that only "then," upon the future redemption and rebuilding of the Sanctuary, will full rejoicing be permitted, whereas in our present state of exile, one must maintain an underlying posture of reverence and sober remembrance.

E. NOT TO SING OVER WINE, IF IT IS NOT FOR A MITZVAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-21, 46-3, 49-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

In commemoration of the mourning over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, our Sages decreed that one must not sing songs — even vocal music without musical instruments — over wine at social drinking feasts (Talmud Bavli, Gittin 7a, Sotah 48a), as Scripture laments: "They shall not drink wine with song; strong drink shall be bitter to those who drink it" (Yeshayahu 24:9). However, singing songs of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem (tishbachos), such as traditional zemiros at the Shabbos table or joyous singing at a wedding or celebratory feast of a mitzvah (seudas mitzvah), is entirely permissible and praiseworthy.

F. NOT TO HAVE A SET TIME TO LISTEN TO MUSIC

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture warns: "Rejoice not, O Yisroel, with exultation like the nations" (Hoshea 9:1). Even during personal celebrations such as weddings and festive gatherings, one must not engage in the reckless, hedonistic revelry characteristic of the surrounding nations. While the nations rejoice without spiritual restraint, Klal Yisroel must

maintain elevated, sanctified joy tempered by the awareness of exile and our spiritual distance from Hashem. This posture mirrors the generation in the wilderness, who, upon receiving the rebuke of Moshe Rabbeinu after the sin of the Golden Calf, humbled themselves and set aside all ostentatious displays of celebration, as Scripture testifies: "And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned, and no man put on his ornaments" (Shemos 33:4).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky and another Rosh Yeshivah entered a limousine that was to take them from one wedding to another. Raucous music was blaring from the radio, and the other Rosh yeshivah asked the driver to turn it off. He then looked expectantly at Reb Yaakov for approval. But, to his surprise, Reb Yaakov told him: 'Even though the Gemara (Sotah 48a) says that from the time that the Sanhedrin ceased to sit that we no longer permit singing for pure enjoinment, nevertheless it is allowed in certain cases where it is necessary for one's work. This driver's work is so monotonous that he'll go mad without it and we have no right to ask him to turn it off.'.

Reb Yaakov, By Yonason Rosenblum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

G. TO REMOVE AN ITEM FROM THE MEAL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-12

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages instituted that whenever a person prepares a formal banquet or festive meal for guests, he must intentionally diminish the feast slightly in remembrance of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash (zecher l'churban). For instance, he should leave an empty space on the table devoid of any dish or serving platter, or omit one of the courses that would otherwise be served (Talmud Bavli, Bava Basra 60b).

H. NOT TO WEAR ALL OF YOUR JEWELRY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-13

SEFER CHAREIDIM

In remembrance of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash (zecher l'churban), our Sages established that when a woman adorns herself in silver and gold jewelry, she should intentionally omit one of her customary pieces of jewelry so that her festive adornment remains deliberately incomplete (Talmud Bavli, Bava Basra 60b).

I. A GROOM SHOULD PUT ASHES ON HIS HEAD

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-11

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Following the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, our Sages instituted that on his wedding day, a groom should place a small amount of ashes (eifer mikleh) upon his forehead at the exact location where the head-tefillin (tefillin shel rosh) is worn (Talmud Bavli, Bava Basra 60b). This practice fulfills the verse: "To place upon the mourners of Tzion, to give them glory (pe'er) in place of ashes (eifer)" (Yeshayahu 61:3), ensuring that the memory of Yerushalayim is elevated above one's greatest personal joy (Tehillim 137:6).

2. One Who is Tamei Cannot Enter the Temple Mount

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 193

As the Torah says, If there is among you any man who is not clean… he shall not come within the camp.
(Devarim 23:11, Parshas Ki Seitzei)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- which camp is being referred to here?
- what is the camp of the levites?
- is it permitted to go up to the temple mount today?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

The Sages of blessed memory received through the Oral Tradition (Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 68a) that the scriptural injunction regarding the boundary of sanctified areas designates the "Camp of the Levites" (Machaneh Leviyah), which corresponds halachically to the entire Temple Mount (Har HaBayis).

If an individual in a state of ritual impurity (tamei) transgresses this injunction and enters the sacred boundaries of the Temple Mount, he violates this negative commandment (mitzvas lo sa'aseh).

This prohibition remains in full force in all eras, even after the destruction of the Sanctuary, for both men and women, because the eternal sanctity of the Temple Mount never ceases, and in our times we are all presumed to have contracted ritual impurity from the dead (tumas meis).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Beis HaMikdash was a place where we could be sanctified and elevated by the sanctifying influence of Hashem's presence. This would inspire us and elevate us to greater commitment to becoming G-dly, and perfecting our character. In order to make the makom haMikdash (the sanctuary area) a worthy place to house the presence of Hashem's Shechinah, we have to keep it clear of any impurity.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAN (IBID.)

In order for Hashem's Shechinah to dwell there, it needs to be a holy place without any impurity.

BECHOR SHOR (BAMIDBAR 5:4)

Before one goes into the machaneh Shechinah, the camp of the Divine Presence, you have to purify yourself of all spiritual and moral impurities, of theft, dishonesty, and sexual immorality so that we are almost like angels before we enter. A person with tzara'as (social sins), zav (sexual sins), or tumas meis (bein adam lemakom sins) cannot go in.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 362)

A body that has no neshamah only has the yetzer hara left. Man's sanctity comes from his soul. The body is the vehicle for sin. When a person sins it pollutes his body. When the soul leaves, all that is left is the polluted body and there is no soul to bring sanctity. That is why the soulless body is impure.

That body has a spirit of tumah that blocks the neshamah of those who touch it. Tumah is a spiritual barrier that prevents the nefesh hasichlis, the mind and conscience, from properly influencing a person. It is important to clear that separation before entering the holy environs of the Beis HaMikdash.

ABARBANEL (IBID.)

The Mikdash, in the center of the Jewish people, symbolizes the human heart. The closer one gets to the heart, the more pure and refined things must be. The heart has to be totally pure.

RAV AHARON FELDMAN

The Mikdash symbolizes olam haba, the future holy world where there is no death. The goal is to spread that kedushah across the whole world so that we reach the era of olam haba. That is why no connection with death is allowed in the Mikdash.

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Other cultures taught that one is close to God only after they die. The Torah rather teaches that we are close to Hashem in this world through Torah and mitzvos. That is why the Beis HaMikdash, the sanctuary of the Torah, cannot have any connection with death.

SFAS EMES

• If the tamei is sent from the camp, is his exclusion final — does the dross mean the vessel is ruined? The Sfas Emes answers in the Naso inyan with the metallurgy of the finished vessel. At Sinai Israel became vessels for the Creator's service — but first they had to be refined in Egypt, in the iron smelting furnace (be-chur ha-barzel): for as long as dross is mixed in the silver, it cannot join to become a vessel. For Har Habayis: the tamei is sent out so that the vessel is not joined while the dross blocks it — but the vessel itself stands formed, and washing is always near, which is why the exclusion carries its own return (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5659).

• The halachah of Har Habayis rests on a gradation: the Temple Mount inherits the kedushah of the Levite Camp (Machaneh Leviyah), and the tamei is barred by degree — the metzora from all camps, the zav from the Levite camp, the tamei meis from the camp of the Shechinah. The Sfas Emes finds this gradation already inside the Naso inyan: there is a camp within a camp, and likewise many degrees of tumah. The inner secret lies in the difference between mixture in essence and blemish by accident. So the graded bar is itself the taam: each camp is a deeper interior of oneness, and the tumah that cannot dwell in it is the dross that divides — which is why sending the impure outside the camp is commanded precisely where the camp gathers as one (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5646).

• The Sfas Emes states the gradation outright in the Metzora inyan, on the midrash: there are three kinds of tumah: the tamei meis is sent from the camp of the Shechinah; the zav from the Levite camp; the metzora from all the camps. The answer begins before the camps, in the verse "I said: You are angelic beings" (Ani amarti Elokim atem): when Hashem set His Godhood upon us and said "I am Hashem" (Anochi Hashem), Israel became like a brand-new creation (ki-veriyah chadashah), and therefore they received righteous laws and judgments unmatched among any other creatures. For Har Habayis: the tamei may not enter because the holy ground meets the soul at its own level, and the level that is blemished must be sent out to be repaired — each sending matched to its depth, from the outermost camp to the innermost, until the whole man can stand whole before the King (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Metzora 5653).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the idea of Hashem's presence dwelling among us only if we are holy
- Discuss the idea of tumas meis
- Discuss the idea of preserving a pure heart at all costs
- Discuss the idea of the future world being a time of no death because it will no longer be necessary to purify us of our aveiros.
- Discuss the idea of Techias Hameisim

3. A Kohen Cannot Become Tamei from a Corpse

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 141

As the Torah says, None shall defile himself for the dead among his people (Vayikra 21:1, Parshas Emor)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can a cohen touch a dead person?
- Can a cohen even bend over a dead person?
- Can a cohen carry the coffin of a dead person?
- Can a cohen walk in a cemetery?
- Is this limited to the body itself?
- Can a cohen touch the splattered blood of a person who was killed?
- If a Kohen finds a dead person lying in a field, can he bury him?

- Can a female cohen touch a dead person?
- Can a Kohen who is a chalal touch a dead person?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This prohibition applies equally whether a Kohen contracts corpse-impurity through direct physical contact (maga);

Through overshadowing or forming a shelter over the corpse (ohel);

Through carrying or moving the corpse (massa);

Or through touching an enclosed grave (kever).

The halachah applies identically to an intact human corpse;

As well as to any severed limb, flesh, or halachic quantity of blood that has separated from a deceased body.

A Kohen who deliberately defiles himself through any form of corpse-impurity violates this negative commandment (mitzvas lo sa'aseh) and is liable to court-administered lashes (malkus).

However, in the case of an unattended, abandoned corpse (meis mitzvah) where no other person is available to provide burial, even a Kohen — and even the Kohen Gadol — is religiously obligated to defile himself to ensure a dignified burial.

This prohibition applies in all places and at all times, for male Kohanim of valid, unblemished priestly lineage (kohanim k'sheirim);

It does not apply to a disqualified or profaned priest (chalal);

Nor does it apply to female descendants of Aaron (kohanos), as Scripture specifies "the sons of Aaron" (Vayikra 21:1) — and not the daughters of Aaron.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Beis HaMikdash was a place where we could be sanctified and elevated by the sanctifying influence of Hashem's presence. This would inspire us and elevate us to greater commitment to becoming G-dly, and perfecting our character. In order to make the makom hamikdash (the sanctuary area) a worthy place to house the presence of Hashem's shechina, we have to keep it clear of any impurity. That is why the Kohanim, those who worked in the Beis HaMikdash cannot become Tamei.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:47)

The kohanim need to be ready at all times to enter the Mikdash, which requires one to be tahor (pure).

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 263)

A body that has no neshamah only has the yetzer hara left. That body has an impure spirit that blocks the neshamah of those who touch it. A Kohein who is a servant of Hashem should try to avoid that at all times.

RAMBAN

Because the kohanim are servants of Hashem, they have to hold themselves to a higher standard and never become tamei.

SFORNO

A kohen needs to be respected so that his teachings will be listened to. For him to go to a funeral for someone who he is not closely related to would require him to disqualify himself of his service for at least a week, and that is not respectful.

SFAS EMES

• The Midrash on "The words of Hashem are pure words" (imros Hashem imros tehoros) teaches that Hashem's gift of purity stays in Israel even when they fall from their level: the sayings are pure forever, and though Israel fell, the purity remained within them, preserved through the tribe of Levi. The difficulty is the direction of the flow: does the kohen's purity belong to him, or does it belong to the whole? If it is his own, his guarding of it is his own business; if it is the nation's, then his lav is the nation's fence. The Sfas Emes reads the verse's logic through the midrash of the utterances: the purity is a deposit, not a possession. Guarding the kohen's purity is guarding the nation's reserve of taharah — the deposit must stay intact, because it was never his alone to risk, and because a deposit spent on death cannot be returned to the depositors in life (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5640).

• The Sfas Emes explains that a human being is a miniature universe (olam katan). Just as the physical world contains two great luminaries, the human being possesses two corresponding spiritual faculties: the mind (mo'ach) and the heart (lev). He teaches that the main struggle of avodah takes place within the heart, where a person must distinguish and clarify his conflicting desires. The heart contains the possibility of serving Hashem, but it is also the place where impulses and distractions can conceal that desire. The moon represents the purification of the heart because true spiritual renewal requires purifying the heart (birur ha-lev), uncovering the good within the heart so that a new, steadfast spirit (ruach nachon) can be received (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Parshas HaChodesh 5661).

• The Midrash on the ov and yidoni draws the great contrast: the nations' occult wisdom grows by clinging to the dead and the defiled; from them they seek the dead's knowledge. The Sfas Emes explains that the key lies in the two knowledges: the kohen who serves Hashem and asks through the urim vetumim is forbidden to defile himself with a corpse, because all death was made from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The lav keeps the channel clear: the one who draws Supernal Knowledge (da'as elyon) from above may not touch the tree of death from below, lest the lower clinging contaminate the upper asking. His purity is the price of his prophecy (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5651).

• The Midrash asks the obvious question: why does the verse repeat the verb of speaking twice ("Speak to the Kohanim… and say to them")? The Sfas Emes answers with a definition: a saying is itself attachment, the joining of the thing to its root, as in Hashem has distinguished you today—making us one unique entity in the world. So the doubling of the command is its own commentary: the whole mitzvah is about dveikus, about being joined to the root. And then the grandfather, the Chiddushei Harim, supplies the definition that makes the taam: all tumas

mes is nothing but disconnection from inner vitality. He may not touch the corpse because the corpse is the visible form of what he is forbidden to become: unattached, cut off from the root, a branch lying on the ground. His purity is not hygiene; it is aliveness (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5633).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A Kohen entered a metropolitan museum to examine ancient artifacts and unwittingly walked into a pavilion containing preserved ancient Egyptian mummies and human remains, contracting ritual defilement under a shared roof (tumas ohel). The museum guards blocked the entrance and threatened to violently drag him through other exhibits if he did not walk out immediately. Is the Kohen permitted to walk voluntarily through the museum to exit, or must he let himself be dragged?

Answer: Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l ruled to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein that once a Kohen is trapped in a museum wing or courtyard and the guards will inevitably drag him out through the room containing human remains against his will, he is not required to force the guards to physically drag and beat him; based on Pesachim (20b), since he will inevitably pass through the ohel ha-mes anyway, he may walk out briskly on his own feet.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim, p. 164

A. A KOHEN CANNOT GO INTO THE SAME SHELTER AS A CORPSE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 29-95

As it is written "he should not come close to the soul of the dead" (Vayikra 21:11, Parshas Emor)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Does it make a difference if the deceased was Jewish or not?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A Kohen is forbidden to enter any shelter or structure containing a human corpse, nor may he overshadow a corpse or grave, as Scripture commands: "He shall not go in to any dead body" (Vayikra 21:11). Rabbeinu Tam upheld the ruling of the Sages who maintain that both Jewish and non-Jewish corpses transmit ritual impurity through an enclosure (tumas ohel). Other authorities, however, follow the view of Rabbi R' Shimon bar Yochai (Talmud Bavli, Yevamos 61a), which holds that the graves of non-Jews do not convey impurity via an enclosure (ohel), but transmit impurity only through direct contact (maga) or carrying (massa). In practice, halachic authorities rule that one who is scrupulously stringent to avoid overshadowing the graves of non-Jews as well is praiseworthy and shall receive blessing (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 372:2).

B. A KOHEN MUST BECOME TAMEI FOR A CLOSE RELATIVE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-56

As it says "to her he can become impure (Vayikra 21:3, Parshas Emor)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a positive commandment from the Torah for an ordinary Kohen (Kohen Hedyot) to defile himself to attend to the burial of his close relatives: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, his unmarried sister, and his halachically married wife, as Scripture states: "For her he shall defile himself" (Vayikra 21:3). Our Sages learned through the Oral Tradition that this is not merely a concession or permission, but an absolute positive commandment (mitzvas aseh) incumbent upon the Kohen. While this specific suspension of the priestly restriction applies directly to male Kohanim — since women are not subject to the prohibition of corpse defilement — the Rosh clarifies that the fundamental obligation to mourn and attend to the burial of these close relatives rests upon all of Klal Yisroel, men and women alike.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: Betzalel was called by that name on account of his wisdom. At the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: 'Go say to Betzalel: Make for Me a Mishkan (Sanctuary), an Ark, and sacred vessels,' Moshe went and reversed the order, saying to him: 'Make an Ark, vessels, and a Mishkan.' Betzalel said to him: 'Moshe our teacher, the universal practice of the world is that a person first builds a house, and afterward brings furnishings into it; yet you tell me: Make an Ark, vessels, and a Mishkan! The vessels that I make, where shall I place them? Could it be that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to you: Make a Mishkan, an Ark, and vessels?' Moshe said to him: 'Perhaps you were standing in the very shadow of God (b'tzel Kel), and you knew!'

Shemos Rabbah 50:1; Talmud Bavli, Berachos 55a

4. Not to Build a Sanctuary with the Exact Dimensions of the Temple

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 144

As the Torah says, "You shall not make Me" (Shemos 20:20, Parshas Yisro)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What should one avoid doing when making a building?
- Does that apply to making the dimensions of the courtyard?
- Can one make a replica of the other vessels?
- Can one make a menorah like the Beis Hamikdash, but with more or less branches? How about one that is made out of wood?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

It is forbidden by the Torah (Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 24a–b, Avodah Zarah 43a):

SFAS EMES

• The halachic prohibition is puzzling: why fence off the measurements of the Beis Hamikdash from private building? Dimensions seem neutral — a courtyard raised "like the Azarah" harms no one and recalls the holy place. Yet the gemara in Rosh Hashana forbids a house patterned on the Heichal, a portico on the Ulam, a courtyard against the Azarah, a table or menorah in the Temple vessels' likeness. What is the danger in an honest imitation, built with no idolatrous intent and put to no sacred use? If the worry were only confusion — that onlookers might mistake the house for the Mikdash and offer sacrifices there — the ban would track function, not form. A house copied in the Temple's dimensions claims the form while bypassing the showing — a vessel with no root, a dwelling that draws no Shechinah. The Torah forbids the imitation so the pattern stays where it belongs: given, never taken (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5645).

• If the Mikdash's dimensions are divinely ordained, why must the law forbid imitating them? What, then, would the copyist actually be copying — and why does the law treat his imitation as if it touched the holy itself? The answer lies in what the builders themselves never claimed. He teaches explicitly: man cannot truly make the pattern at all; only through will, intention, and faith, doing every deed for the sake of Heaven (le-shem Shamayim) to resemble the hinted thing, does the work draw down the Shechinah, and only afterward then it is truly done, as the daughters of Tzelofchad spoke rightly and were answered. The builder who imitates the dimensions pretends to a finished possession that even Bezalel never claimed; his copy is all form and no showing, measurements with no root, a house that gestures at the sanctuary while bypassing everything that made the sanctuary holy. The Torah bans the copy so that no one mistakes man's architecture for the revealed pattern — the form stays holy by staying unrepeatable (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Terumah 5637).

To construct a private dwelling modeled after the exact architectural dimensions of the Sanctuary hall (Heichal);

To build an entrance portico matching the proportions of the Temple Antechamber (Ulam), which measured twenty cubits in width and forty cubits in height;

To design a courtyard conforming precisely to the layout of the Temple Courtyard (Azarah);

To fashion a table modeled precisely after the Golden Table (Shulchan) of the Sanctuary;

Or to craft a seven-branched metal candelabrum modeled after the sacred Menorah of the Beis HaMikdash.

However, if a candelabrum is fashioned with fewer or more than seven branches — such as six or eight branches;

Or if it is constructed from non-metallic materials such as wood or stone, even if it has seven branches, it is permissible.

This prohibition applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Beis HaMikdash was a place where we could be sanctified and elevated by the sanctifying influence of Hashem's presence. This would inspire us and elevate us to greater commitment to becoming G-dly, and perfecting our character. This is a mitzvah of showing respect to the Beis HaMikdash. We are able to absorb the sanctity and elevating influence of the sanctuary to the degree that we revere and respect its holiness.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 108)

This shows respect for the Beis Hamikdash making it exclusive for Hashem. It is like a kings scepter that can only be used by the king. The more respect we have for it, the greater we are able to be elevated by it.

5. Not to Replicate the Ketores of the Temple

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 146

As the Torah says, And the incense… In its composition you shall not make for yourselves… Whoever shall make any like it to savor its scent shall be Cut off (Shemos 30:37-39 Parshas Ki Sisa).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is it only a problem to make the exact amounts as prescribed. How about to make the same proportions. How about to make different proportions?
- Do you have to actually smell it to be liable, or is making it inherently forbidden?
- Can one make it to teach how to make it properly for the temple?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Even if a person does not compound the full annual measure of the sacred incense (ketores) but prepares only a fraction of it — such as a half or a third — as long as he compounds it according to the precise biblical ratio of its eleven spices, he is liable to kares (spiritual excision) if committed deliberately, or is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas) if done unwittingly (b'shogeg).

If one compounds this mixture with the intention of inhaling its fragrance, he incurs liability immediately upon completing the formulation, even before he actually smells it;

However, if he compounds the mixture solely for the purpose of instructional study or scientific analysis (l'hislamed), he is exempt from biblical penalty.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Beis HaMikdash was a place where we could be sanctified and elevated by the sanctifying influence of Hashem's presence. This would inspire us and elevate us to greater commitment to becoming G-dly, and perfecting our character. This is a mitzvah of showing respect to the Beis HaMikdash. We are able to absorb the sanctity and elevating influence of the sanctuary to the degree that we revere and respect its holiness.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 108)

This shows respect for the Beis Hamikdash by making it exclusive for Hashem. It is like a kings scepter that can only be used by the king. The more respect we have for it, the greater we are able to be elevated by it.

6. Not to Replicate the Anointing Oil of the Temple

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 145

As the Torah says, and you shall not make any like it, according to its composition (Shemos 30:32, Parshas Ki Sisa).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Can one make it to teach how to make it properly for the temple?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

We are commanded not to manufacture any oil according to the precise formulation and proportions of the sacred anointing oil (shemen hamishchah) described in the Torah (Shemos 30:31–33). If one willfully manufactures this mixture, he is liable to kares (spiritual excision), and if he does so unwittingly (b'shogeg), he is obligated to bring a sin-offering (chattas).

Liability is incurred only if one prepares the oil with the intention of using it for personal anointing; if one prepares it solely for instructional study and demonstration (l'hislamed), he is exempt from penalty.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

SFAS EMES

• The gemara in Horayos teaches: the anointing oil was hidden away with the aron, together with the jar of manna and Aharon's staff. The difficulty: why would Hashem withdraw from Israel the very instrument of kedusha — the oil that anoints kohanim and kings? And why does the Sfas Emes add that its powers remain stored for the generations? A hidden thing is usually a lost thing; here the hiding is a preservation. The geniza itself is a doctrine, and it carries the taam of the ban. The Sfas Emes explains that just as the anointing oil, the jar of manna, and Aharon's staff were hidden away for all generations, the spiritual forces that Moshe and Aharon drew down remain stored in the treasury of Heaven for every generation. The oil's kedusha exists in the mode of withdrawn, intact, enduring — and any human compounding would be a forgery of the sealed original, a counterfeit of what heaven keeps in its treasury (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5647).

• The Torah seals the anointing oil with a double prohibition: it may not be poured on ordinary flesh — and its very recipe may not be reproduced: "whoever compounds anything like it shall be cut off" (ish asher yirkach kamohu ve-nichras). Why should compounding the same mixture carry kares, the severest cut? The Sfas Emes explains: since it is written, "Upon human flesh it shall not be poured," Aharon, once anointed, was vested in the garment of an angel of Hashem. That is why he trembled: he had been transformed out of his human skin, and he feared that his lower part was not yet joined to the part poured upon him from above. Hashem alone vests; man may not run the workshop of investiture. The kares is the measure-for-measure: one who reproduces the oil severs himself from the source, because he has tried to become the source (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Korach 5651).

• Koheles teaches: a good name is better than good oil. The midrash in Koheles Rabbah expounds it: Nadav and Avihu, who were burned, had been anointed with the anointing oil. The difficulty: what is this "good oil," and why does its counterfeit carry kares? If the oil's goodness is in its recipe, a perfect copy should be equally good. But the Sfas Emes shows that the oil's goodness is not in its chemistry at all; it is in its direction — it comes from above, and that is why it may never be made from below. Kedusha descends; it is never synthesized. The workshop may compound spices, but it may not compound heaven (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Shemos 5631).

The Beis HaMikdash was a place where we could be sanctified and elevated by the sanctifying influence of Hashem's presence. This would inspire us and elevate us to greater commitment to becoming G-dly, and perfecting our character. This is a mitzvah of showing respect to the Beis HaMikdash. We are able to absorb the sanctity and elevating influence of the sanctuary to the degree that we revere and respect its holiness.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 108)

This shows respect for the Beis Hamikdash by making it exclusive for Hashem. It is like a kings scepter that can only be used by the king. The more respect we have for it, the greater we are able to be elevated by it.

TEFILLAH: SERVICE OF THE HEART AND INTROSPECTION

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to the mitzvah of prayer. This mitzvah helps to build our relationship with Hashem, and inspires us to perfect our character to come close to Hashem.

7. To Pray (Tefillah)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 7

As the Torah says, "and Him you shall serve (Devarim 6:13, Parshas Va'eschanan).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Are there basic requirements for a prayer?
- Is prayer to simply say the words?
- Where should you imagine yourself standing when you pray?
- should a person pray when his thoughts are unsettled and can't focus?
- Are women obligated to pray?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Through the Oral Tradition, our Sages learned (Talmud Bavli, Taanis 2a) that the scriptural command of divine service refers specifically to prayer (tefillah), as Scripture states: "And to serve Him with all your heart" (Devarim 11:13). Chazal asked: What constitutes service of the heart? That is tefillah.

The essential biblical framework of this commandment requires that an individual:

First open his prayer by articulating the praises and greatness of the Almighty (shevach);

Subsequently petition Hashem for his necessary physical and spiritual needs (bakashah);

And conclude by expressing sincere praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude for His enduring lovingkindness (hoda'ah).

It is essential to pray with genuine concentration of the heart (kavanah), clearing the mind of all extraneous, worldly distractions;

A person should visualize himself as standing directly before the Shechinah (Divine Presence), never reciting his prayer as if unburdening himself of an onerous load that he rushes to cast off before hurrying away.

Nor should a person stand in prayer while his mind is agitated, distressed, or unsettled by anxiety or grief.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Prayer inspires us to develop a close relationship to Hashem. It also is a time to remind ourselves of the fundamentals of Judaism and about our mission on earth, which is to perfect ourselves and the world.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:44)

The purpose of tefillah is to develop love for Hashem, reverence of Hashem, trust in Hashem, a commitment to keep the mitzvos, and to help us develop proper perspective and character.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 434)

Hashem wants to give us all that we need. But He wants us to ask for it first. This helps us remember where things come from so we can develop an appreciation to Hashem and remember to use it properly.

RALBAG

Tefillah helps us to learn about Hashem's middos, so that we can learn to emulate and come close to Him.

MABIT — BEIS ELOKIM, SHA'AR TEFILLAH 2

Tefillah makes us realize and internalize that Hashem is the only true power and source in the world. No one else can benefit us or protect us.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:5)

Although man needs an attachment to the physical world, man has to ensure that he does not get pulled down excessively, because the more he is attached to the material, the more he distances himself from Hashem's light (ohr), and absorbs darkness (choshech).

In order to prevent man from being pulled down by the physical world, Hashem established a spiritual remedy (tikun): before engaging in worldly effort, one should first draw close to Hashem through tefillah, pray for his needs, and articulate that he is utterly dependent on Hashem. This prayer must precede all human effort (hishtadlus).

In this manner, when he achieves the physical sustenance he labored for, he will not be dragged down by it, because he has already attributed it entirely (toleh) to Hashem. Thus, the tikun of tefillah prevents material success from turning into a spiritual descent (yeridah).

The closeness achieved with Hashem is an act of pure chesed. By strict merit alone, one would not be worthy (zocheh) of such closeness (kirvah), being distanced from the light and immersed in darkness. Nevertheless, Hashem gave man the sublime capacity to stand before Him, call out to Him, and thereby elevate himself above his natural lowly state to place his fate into Hashem's hands.

Because of that profound closeness, it is forbidden to make an interruption (mafsik) during tefillah. That is also why we take three steps back at the conclusion, reverently withdrawing to our everyday state.

After a person accepts the yoke of Heaven (mekabel ol Malchus Shamayim) through tzitzis and is sanctified with tefillin, he is properly equipped for his tefillah to have its cosmic effect upon the universe, in addition to transforming his own soul. Tefillah accomplishes two profound purposes:

1. It elevates the entire universe to a state where it is receptive to divine abundance (shefa).

2. Beyond creating this receptivity, it actively channels and draws forth that divine abundance (shefa) to the entire universe.

The sections of prayer leading up to Shemoneh Esrei prepare the universe to receive the divine outflow (hashpa'ah). The Shemoneh Esrei itself draws it down, and the concluding prayers strengthen and complete the divine outflow that has descended.

SFAS EMES

• A person usually begins to pray because something is lacking. He needs health, livelihood, children, wisdom, forgiveness, or relief from a difficult situation. It would therefore seem that the purpose of tefillah is simply to secure the requested result. The Sfas Emes explicitly rejects that as an adequate description of the mitzvah. The highest level of prayer is to direct oneself toward the tefillah itself rather than toward the fulfillment of the request. Rather, he is showing the deeper purpose hidden within those requests. The answer to prayer is one gift; the transformation of the person into one who stands in dveikus before Hashem is a greater one (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5633).

• Moshe Rabbeinu had extraordinary zechuyos, yet he began his prayer with the word Va'eschanan ("And I pleaded for grace"). Chazal explain that the tzaddikim do not ask on the basis of what they deserve; they ask only for an unearned gift of grace (matnas chinam). The Sfas Emes sees this as a central avodah of prayer. Spiritual accomplishments can themselves become a source of subtle ego and selfhood (yeshus). A person may begin to relate to Hashem as though his Torah and mitzvos have created a claim. The tzaddik approaches Hashem with the awareness that even his own avodah is possible only because Hashem gave him life, ability, Torah, and opportunity. The word supplications (tachanunim) thus describes the correct inner stance of tefillah: dependence without entitlement, trust without demand, and deep recognition that everything comes from His blessed kindness (chasdo yisbarach) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5639).

• The Sfas Emes asks a fundamental question. If everything that happens to a person occurs according to Hashem's justice (mishpat), what is the meaning of asking that the situation change? If the strict judgment (din) is just, why should tefillah alter it? His answer is that Hashem's inner will (ratzon) is higher than the present form of justice (mishpat). After contemplating Hashem's greatness and omnipotence, the person understands that the existing decree does not exhaust the possibilities of Divine governance (hanhagah). The justice (mishpat) can change for the good through a higher inner will (ratzon). Tefillah therefore embodies a radical emunah in Hashem's freedom. The world is governed with justice (mishpat), but the Ribbono Shel Olam is not trapped within the structure He governs (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5633).

• Chazal teach that before asking for his needs, a person should first arrange the praise of the Omnipresent (shivcho shel Makom). The Sfas Emes explains this as part of a larger pattern. The person first fulfills what is within his own ability: "to recount the praise of the Omnipresent according to one's capacity." This is the proper place of tefillah. It begins when man recognizes both what Hashem expects him to do and what he cannot accomplish by himself. A person who refuses to use the spiritual power (koach) Hashem has already given him is

not expressing true dependence. Thus tefillah does not replace human effort. It teaches the correct meaning of effort: one works with the spiritual power (koach) received from Hashem and asks Hashem for the siyata required beyond it (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5645).

• Chazal teach "the daily prayers were instituted corresponding to the daily Tamid offerings." The Sfas Emes understands this connection at the level of the inner purpose of a korban. The essential korban, he explains, is the human being (ha-adam) himself. The animal provides the external physical deed (ma'aseh), but the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) of the korban is the person's desire to give himself to Hashem. After the physical korbanos became unavailable, this inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) remained accessible through tefillah: "so that spoken prayer becomes a concrete deed joining with the self-sacrifice of one's thought." The mouth now performs what the Altar (mizbei'ach) once expressed in action. The deeper korban remains the same: "from yourselves an offering to Hashem" (mikem korban la-Hashem) (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Vayikra 5643).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Why is tefillah necessary if Hashem knows what we need? Discuss how tefillah is really to elevate us.
- How can we change Hashem's mind with tefillah? Why is that Justice?
- If tefillah is supposed to elevate us, why do we do that by asking for things? Discuss how it is an exercise in elevating our ratzon, our true desires and ambitions.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Shloimke Mandlebrodt, a newcomer to the neighborhood of Bayit VeGan, had to say Kaddish in observance of a yahrtzeit. Living near the Kol Torah Yeshivah, he walked into their shul and asked if he would be able to daven for the amud, as is the custom on the day someone observes a yahrtzeit. He didn't know that this was quite unusual in the yeshivah. Therefore, when he was told that he could do so, and he walked up to begin leading the davening, the yeshivah boys looked quite surprised. It was obvious that Shloimke was not comfortable with davening for the amud, and he knew that his chassidishe accent was different from what the boys were used to hearing. He was davening today because he had to. In a barely audible voice, he began Ashrei. The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, didn't flinch when he heard the unusual accent. He had enormous self-control and outstanding middos, as everyone knew. Some of the younger bachurim tried to hide their amused smirks as Shloimke continued davening. At the end of Shemoneh Esrei, they waited for Tachanun to start, but Shloimke jumped right into Kaddish, because according to some who daven nusach Sefard (including most chassidim), one does not recite Tachanun at Minchah. Rav Shlomo Zalman did not look startled, although the bachurim did. After Kaddish, the boys began to recite Tachanun on their own, but Rav Shlomo Zalman quickly motioned to them to stop. When the davening was finished, Shloimke thanked the Rosh Yeshivah for allowing him to daven. After Shloimke departed, the talmidim asked Rav Shlomo Zalman what they should do about the fact that they had not said Tachanun. The Rosh Yeshivah smiled in his inimitable way. "Bachurim, it is never k'dai to embarrass someone else, even if it means that we won't say Tachanun that day." This remarkable story speaks volumes about how we must act. Often, when there are less than stellar baalei tefillah and baalei keriah for davening and leining, certain mispallelim are tough and judgmental. When someone is insecure, young, or inexperienced, a harsh comment can set his self-esteem back drastically. In shuls, some people appoint themselves to correct the baal keriah. It seems that the more mistakes he makes, the more aggressive the correcting becomes. If indeed some of these gaffes are not serious, we are embarrassing him for no reason! In a similar vein, a young woman was once seen bentching with a great deal of kavanah. Someone was about to comment on it, but was stopped by a woman who motioned not to say anything. After the sincere young girl had finished, the older woman

explained that when she herself was young, she used to bentch the same way. Then someone offended her by saying, "Oh my G-d, are you still bentching?" Horrified, she walked out and cried in humiliation. She did not bentch for three years after that. How careful we must be to hold our tongues! The next time you are about to correct someone think twice about it.

A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, had a special connection with tefillah and utilized the power of his tefillah whenever possible. When he was at a wedding, he would stop whatever he was doing whether it was in the middle of the chuppah, in the middle of dancing, in the middle of a conversation, to tell whomever he was with, "Let's daven for the success of this new young couple in their life together.' "A friend of mine approached me after my wedding," R' Yehuda Bechor related, "and told me that he had noticed the Rosh Yeshivah sitting at one of the tables during the dancing... crying! Yes, crying! The Rosh Yeshivah was crying that the life of the young couple should go well. He was begging Hashem to place his bracha on the shidduch.

From Rav Elya Meir Sorotzkin, By Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In any office, things pile up after a while, and if one doesn't sort through them, they pile up even more. This was true for the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon's home office as well. One time, his son-in-law, R' Moshe Yehuda Halpern, was helping the Mashgiach sort through his office. They were methodically going through the drawers when R' Moshe Yehuda found two small bottles of wine. "What are these?" R' Moshe Yehuda asked Rav Mattisyahu. Rav Mattisyahu smiled. "You know, those bottles were given to me by a mekubal who came to visit. He heard that one of my daughters and sons-in-law had been waiting many years and had still not been blessed with children. He gave a special berachah to these two bottles and told me that if my daughter would drink one bottle and my son-in-law would drink the other, they would be blessed with children..." R' Moshe Yehuda was puzzled as he stared at the full bottles. Clearly, the Mashgiach had not given them to his children to drink. "But the bottles are still full! Why are you keeping them?" Rav Mattisyahu replied, "I specifically kept them because I knew that Hashem would help them. I knew that He would answer them if they davened. I wanted to be able to show them to people so that everyone would realize that the proper approach is to daven, daven, and noch a mohl to daven. Baruch Hashem, they were eventually zocheh to have children because they davened, not because they drank the wine. All one has to do is 'old-fashioned' tefillah from the bottom of one's heart!"

From Rav Matisyahu, By R' Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The principal of a girls' school in Ashdod was a close talmid of R' Aharon Leib. During one school year, he came to the Rosh Yeshivah for advice about a serious issue he was having with the ninth-grade class. The students were constantly fighting and teasing each other, and the bickering had become very disruptive. Even veteran teachers in the school could not remember experiencing such a phenomenon. How could the school inspire its ninth graders to improve their interpersonal relationships and curtail their harmful actions? "What is their daily schedule?" R' Shteinman asked. "The school day begins with Shacharis and the next subject is Chumash," the principal replied. "Have the students skip Shacharis for the next few days. Tell them that communal Shacharis is postponed as per the advice of R' Shteinman, who feels the students should improve in their behavior bein adam la'chaveiro before being given the privilege of davening together in school?" The teachers told the ninth graders that the next day they would begin with Chumash, as communal Shacharis for the next few days was being canceled. This, they explained, was per the directive of R' Aharon Leib Shteinman, who had informed their principal that the girls had to attain a higher spiritual level in order for davening to be reinstated as part of their curriculum. Meanwhile, they should daven individually at home before school and take advantage of that time for serious introspection regarding their actions toward their classmates. Most of the girls were beside themselves with shock. "Did we really fall so" low that we can't daven in school and have to daven at home?" They wondered, some openly sobbing. That evening, the ninth-grade girls gathered together at their own initiative and came up with some practical resolutions to

immediately improve their actions bein adam la'chaveiro. Three years later, the principal told R' Aharon Leib that this class, which was about to graduate, had outstanding middos. The girls were constantly looking for ways to perform chesed for each other and comprised one of the best graduating classes in the history of the school!

From Rav Aharon Leib, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein pointed out that Rav Chaim Kanievsky was like a vessel of oil, filled with Torah, who did not allow any "water" into his mind. He davened to Hashem to help him forget anything unrelated to Torah so that not even a drop of his Torah knowledge would be displaced. "If someone is focused only on Torah," he said, "he merits Hashem's assistance not to get sidetracked by anything else." In a hesped for Rav Chaim, Rabbi Gershon Edelstein quoted the Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu, which says that a person should pray that Torah enters his body, just as he should pray that delicacies should not enter his body. Rabbi Gershon explained that a person's body and brain are limited. Therefore, Rav Chaim made sure to retain only Torah in his brain and not mundane matters. Rav Chaim would pray that nothing should enter his head other than Torah. Rabbi Shlomo recalls, "I once heard Abba say to someone, 'Please don't be upset, but I do not remember your name. I daven three times a day that nothing should go into my mind but Torah.' "What a concept! Not only was his only interest Torah, which occupied most of his day, but he went so far as to daven that nothing else should take up space in his mind!"

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

❖ A plumber came to Rav Chaim Kanievsky's house to make some repairs. As soon as the work was done, Rav Chaim went over to him and paid him, and said, "I would like to ask you something. On the Yamim Nora'im, when the amount of your parnassah for the year is being decided in Shamayim, do you daven that people should have blocked drains, leaky pipes, and other plumbing issues?" The plumber was silent. Rav Chaim continued. "I will tell you how to daven," he said. "Pray that anyone who is meant to suffer this year, either from physical illness or spiritual downfalls, should be spared, and that the decree should be transferred to a plumbing problem instead. In this way, he will gain much, and so will you."

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

❖ It had been a very long Thursday that concluded with the Klausenberger Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam) delivering his Chumash shiur, followed by a very late Maariv. The Rebbe, who was already elderly, finished davening Shemoneh Esrei and was so utterly exhausted that he felt compelled to lie down to gather some strength. Twenty minutes later, he rose, went back to the beis midrash, and said Aleinu with renewed vigor and kavanah. A chassid who witnessed this commented, "I learned a new thing from the Rebbe that night. I learned that the tefillah of Aleinu is an integral part of davening and should never be said just to 'finish davening.' One needs the koach, the strength, to recite Aleinu just as he needs strength to daven the rest of davening. If he feels too tired or lacking strength, he can take a rest, then come back and say Aleinu. Just 'chapping' Aleinu should be unthinkable."

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ The question of whether and how tefillos are answered is often raised. People frequently complain that although they daven fervently, their prayers do not seem to bear fruit. When presented with such observations, Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky would answer with a dvar Torah: "We see in Parashas Vaeschanan that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted so much to go to Eretz Yisrael. He davened so many times, yet Hashem didn't allow him to enter Eretz Yisrael. It is brought down that had Moshe Rabbeinu davened just once more for his heart's desire, Hashem would have acquiesced and Moshe would have gained entry? "This shows us that every single tefillah counts, and one never knows which tefillah will be answered and

when it will be answered. "I asked my husband the Rav what to tell people who say that their prayers have not yet been answered. He said, "If someone sees that he prayed and was not answered, he should pray again, as it says (Tehillim 27:14): Hope to Hashem, strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope to Hashem.'."

Rebbetzin Kanievsky, By Naftali and Sarah Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ During Minchah one day, the chazzan made a mistake in Chazaras HaShatz, and then another mistake a moment later. People were correcting him, but that only made him more flustered. Reb Dovid Feinstein waved to the people to stop correcting the baal tefillah and looked encouragingly at him. Then the baal tefillah concluded the berachah with the wrong words, and the shouting started up again. Reb Dovid, who was never heard to speak during Chazaras HaShatz, called out, "Leave the kid alone," and it was silent. After davening, one of the older congregants came over with a Mishnah Berurah, eager to show the Rosh Yeshivah that the corrections were in place. "I know the Mishnah Berurah," Reb Dovid said, "but what about malbin pnei chaveiro b'rabbim, embarrassing another person in public?"

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Many times, Rav Shlomo Rothenberg would travel into the city for a chasunah and arrive home in the wee hours of the morning. It once happened that the car he had borrowed from his son-in-law, Reb Shraga Mayir Rosenblum, died on the way home, just off the exit leading to Mountaindale, on a deserted road. With no phone in hand and nothing else to do to help the situation, Rav Shlomo spent the remaining few hours of the night sleeping calmly in his car on the side of the road. It was only in the morning that a passing mail carrier noticed his car and offered him a ride home. Rav Shlomo arrived right on time for Shacharis and calmly proceeded to daven as if nothing unusual had occurred. After davening, still unruffled by the incident, he approached Reb Shraga Mayir and nonchalantly told him that his car had died on the side of the road. Reb Shraga Mayir couldn't help but be blown away by the amazing gevurah and tranquility that accompanied Rav Shlomo in this, and every, situation.

From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ One evening before Maariv, a stranger approached the Rosh Yeshivah, Reb Dovid Feinstein, and asked if he could present a complicated shailah. Reb Dovid looked at the clock and said, "There is still one minute remaining until Maariv, so you can start asking now." In sixty seconds, the man shared the basics of the question, and then returned after Maariv. Again, he reviewed the details that he had already shared, and then elaborated, explaining the details of what he was asking. Reb Dovid considered the question and responded. The man appreciated the clarity and thoroughness of the answer, but he had one more question. He was curious: If he would be repeating the question after Maariv regardless, why had the Rosh Yeshivah told him to start sharing it in the remaining minute before Maariv, which was not nearly enough time to explain the entire shailah? In the Shemoneh Esrei of Maariv, Reb Dovid replied, he would be saying the tefillah of Atah chonein l'adam daas, asking Hashem to bestow him with understanding and perceptiveness. "I wanted to have at least some of the basics of the question before, so that when I davened for insight in guiding other people, your shailah would also be included in my request."

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Even when all his efforts seemed to end in abject failure, Reb Shmuel Auerbach couldn't be deterred. Rav Yosef Boylan relates that a neighbor of his in Yerushalayim's Unsdorf neighborhood asked Reb Shmuel for help getting his daughter into a seminary, despite having no prior connection with him. When the father came by to find out what had happened, Reb Shmuel told him he had not succeeded despite doing everything he could for the girl. Then, realizing what he'd just said, he

exclaimed, "Everything I could?! No, I haven't—I can daven!" And with that, he stood up and approached the aron hakodesh in his room, and for the next twenty minutes, poured out his soul to his Maker on the girl's behalf. His tefillah bore fruit, and the young lady gained admission to the seminary.

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

❖ Crown Heights at that time was a lovely middle-class neighborhood where Jews of all affiliations, and non-Jews, lived. Pet dogs were common, and their droppings were a common sight. In those days dog owners were not required to clean up after their dogs. Davening to Hashem requires a high level of cleanliness, and davening in the presence of dog droppings is not permitted and would halachically disqualify one's davening (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 79). Rav Mordechai Schwab was very concerned about not stepping into the dog droppings. When he walked to shul, especially if he attended a shul which was some distance away, he would check his shoes and the shoes of his children before entering shul. Rav Mordechai was also concerned about the davening of other Jews, who were not aware of this halachah. On Thursday evenings he would take his two youngest children and they would clean the area near the shul of all dog droppings. This episode shows the great concern that Rav Mordechai had for other people's prayers.

From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press

❖ One day, Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus's brother accompanied him in a taxi. "When I asked him why he didn't travel by bus to save the fare, he turned to me in surprise and asked, "How much do you think these glasses cost? About a thousand shekels! You don't think that guarding my eyes is worth the fifteen shekels I spent on the cab?"

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

❖ Rav Yehoshua Schwab recalled another incident when his father, Rav Mordechai Schwab, and his grandfather were walking to yeshiva and came upon a terrible accident. Ambulances, policemen, acquaintances, and just curious onlookers were all on the scene. Of course, there was much discussion as to what exactly happened. Rav Mordechai realized that this was an extremely serious accident and began to urge people to move to the side to say some Tehillim for the poor individual. Discussing the details of the accident would not help the person who was hurt, but saying Tehillim certainly would.

From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press

A. TO DAVEN WITH CONCENTRATION AND FEELING, NOT OUT OF ROTE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must never treat prayer as a rigid, perfunctory routine (keva) or as an onerous burden that one is eager to cast aside; rather, prayer must be poured forth as genuine supplication and heartfelt pleading for mercy before Hashem (Pirkei Avos 2:13).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ They said of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa that while he was standing and praying the Amidah, a venomous reptile (arod) bit him, yet he did not interrupt his prayer! His disciples ran to the reptile's hole and found the arod lying dead at the entrance of its burrow. They exclaimed: 'Woe to the person whom an arod bites, and woe to the arod that bites Rabbi

Chanina ben Dosa!' When he finished his prayer, his disciples asked him: 'Master, did you not even feel it bite you?' He answered them: 'I swear to you, because my heart was completely absorbed in my prayer before my Creator, I did not even feel it!'

Tosefta, Berachos 3:20

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ No matter what was going on in the Klausenberger Rebbe's (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam's) life, even when he was under tremendous pressure or feeling terribly ill, when he began to daven, he was transported to a different plane. The world was completely forgotten. Nothing existed beyond his davening. The Rebbe never looked at his watch during davening. It was as if time stood still. There was no set time to start, and certainly no set time to finish. When it came to davening, the only thing in his world was the siddur. In fact, the Rebbe had an aversion to davening when he had a time limit. There was a time when the Rebbe had to leave the house within forty-five minutes to catch a flight. The gabbai proposed that the Rebbe begin davening right away so they would make it to the plane on time, but the Rebbe refused. "Davening is something that cannot be done when 'pushed against the wall,'" he said. While the Rebbe also abhorred davening on the plane, he still chose to do that without being limited by time rather than daven at home under pressure.

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

B. TO DAVEN TO HASHEM IN NEED

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 13–19

As it says "When you go to wage war on the oppressor that oppresses you and you will cry out... and you will be remembered before Hashem your God and you will be saved from your enemies" (Bamidbar 10:9, Parshas Beha'aloscha)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Why is this so important?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is an active positive commandment from the Torah (mitzvas aseh) to cry out and pray before Hashem whenever any communal distress befalls the Jewish people — such as pestilence, war, famine, drought, or locust plagues (Rambam, Hilchos Ta'aniyos 1:1–3). This awakening is a foundational path of repentance (teshuvah), designed to impress upon the community that calamity is not a random, accidental occurrence of nature, but a direct decree from the King of the Universe prompting them to examine their deeds. Recognizing this truth, people are moved to abandon wrongdoing, restore any stolen property, cry out in sincere prayer before Hashem, and return wholeheartedly to His service, as Scripture commands: "When you go to war in your land against an adversary who oppresses you, you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before Hashem your God, and you will be saved from your enemies" (Bamidbar 10:9). Our Sages explain that this sounding of the alarm includes the verbal outcry of heartfelt prayer.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A married woman was diagnosed with a serious, life-threatening illness. Fearing that the news would cause her elderly parents unbearable emotional distress and worry, she strictly forbade her husband from telling anyone about her condition, specifically instructing him never to reveal it to her parents. As her medical treatments intensified, her husband watched her struggle and felt deeply torn. On the one hand, revealing a private matter against his wife's explicit wishes violates the prohibition against disclosing secrets (gilui sod) and breaches the sacred trust of marriage. On the other hand, a father's heartfelt prayer for his child carries immense, unique spiritual power in the Heavenly realms, and those tefillos could literally save her life. Is the husband permitted to inform his father-in-law about his daughter's illness so that he can storm the Heavens on her behalf? What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the husband should inform the father of his daughter's illness so that he can daven for her recovery. The prayer of a loving father for his child possesses extraordinary, transcendent power to pierce the Heavens and overturn harsh decrees. Halachah assumes an umdena (a definitive legal presumption) that had the daughter truly comprehended how vital and lifesaving her father's prayers are to her recovery, she would have readily consented. Therefore, the obligation to save her life (pikuach nefesh) and mobilize her father's powerful tefillos overrides her temporary desire for secrecy.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 149

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Once, the people asked Choni the Circle-Maker to pray for rain during a severe drought. Confident that his prayer would be answered, he told them, 'Go out and bring in your clay Pesach ovens so that they do not dissolve in the rain.' Yet when he prayed, no rain fell. What did he do? He drew a circle on the ground, stood inside it, and declared before Hashem: 'Master of the Universe! Your children have turned their faces to me because I am like a member of Your household before You. I swear by Your great Name that I will not move from here until You have mercy upon Your children!' Raindrops began to trickle down. Choni said, 'This is not what I asked for, but rather rain sufficient to fill cisterns, ditches, and caves!' The rain then began to pour down with violent force. Choni said, 'This is not what I asked for, but rather rain of goodwill, blessing, and generosity!' The rain then fell normally until the people of Jerusalem had to go up to the Temple Mount for shelter from the rising water. They came and said to him, 'Just as you prayed for the rain to fall, now pray for it to stop!' He replied, 'Go out and see whether the Stone of Claimants has been submerged—just as it is impossible for that stone to be erased, so too it is improper to pray for the removal of an abundance of blessing.' Shimon ben Shetach sent word to him: 'Were you not Choni, I would place you under a ban for speaking so boldly to Heaven! But what can I do to you, since you plead naggingly before the Omnipresent and He fulfills your desire just like a son who pleads with his father and his father fulfills his desire! Regarding you Scripture says: Let your father and your mother rejoice, and let her who bore you be glad (Mishlei 23:25).'

Mishnah, Taanis 3:8

C. TO SAY TEFILLAS HADERECH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-38

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One who embarks on a journey is obligated to recite the Traveler's Prayer (Tefillas HaDerech), because all roads are halachically presumed to carry potential hazards (kol haderachim b'chezkas sakkanah; Talmud Bavli, Berachos 29b–30a). Whenever feasible and safe, one should ideally pause his travel to recite this prayer while standing in place rather than while in active motion (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 110:4–5).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ A sage recounted: Once I was traveling from place to place when an elder met me on the road and asked, 'Rabbi, why is it that many righteous householders in Israel wait years before being blessed with children?' I answered him: 'My son, it is because the Holy One, blessed be He, loves them with a complete love and longs to hear their heartfelt prayers! Come and learn from Abraham and Sarah, who waited and poured out their hearts in prayer until Isaac was born to great joy; and learn from Rebecca and Rachel, whose prayers were cherished on high until Hashem answered them with blessing.'

Yalkut Shimoni, Nach 78

D. TO GO TO A TZADIK TO DAVEN FOR YOU

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42–19

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Anyone who experiences adversity or has an ill individual in his household should approach a Torah scholar (talmid chacham) or righteous person (tzaddik) so that he may intercede and pray for heavenly mercy on their behalf (Talmud Bavli, Bava Basra 116a). This principle is derived from the verse: "The wrath of a king is like messengers of death, but a wise man will appease it" (Mishlei 16:14).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When the Roman Empire issued a harsh decree forbidding the Jews of the Land of Israel from keeping Shabbos and performing Bris Milah (circumcision), the Sages chose Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and young Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yose to travel to Rome to plead for the decree to be annulled. Along the road, the spirit Ben Temalyon came out to meet them and asked: 'Do you wish for me to come along and help you?' Rabbi Shimon wept and said: 'To the maidservant of my father Avraham's house (Hagar), an angel of Heaven appeared three times, and to me not even once! Nevertheless, let the miracle come from whatever source!' Ben Temalyon raced ahead and entered the Roman Emperor's daughter, causing her to thrash about until none of the royal physicians could heal her. When Rabbi Shimon arrived at the palace, he whispered in the princess's ear: 'Ben Temalyon, come out! Ben Temalyon, come out!' Immediately the spirit departed and the princess was completely healed! Overjoyed, the Emperor told Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar: 'Enter my royal treasure vault and take whatever reward you desire!' They walked into the imperial archives, searched until they found the parchment scroll of the evil decree against Shabbos and Bris Milah, took it as their sole reward, and tore it to shreds!

Talmud Bavli, Meilah 17b (34:4–6)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ "When my grandfather was seriously ill, my father took me to the Mashgiach, Rav Mordechai Schwab, to ask him to daven on his behalf. I'll never forget it. The Mashgiach was visibly shaken to hear that my grandfather was so sick. He started to krechtz (sigh) in obvious emotional pain. Then he took out a notebook full of names of the sick people that he was davening for. He sadly wrote down my grandfather's name, and bentched him with a refuah sheleimah. He then asked that we please come back when my grandfather would im yirtzeh Hashem recover, because many people don't and he is still in continuous pain for each and every choleh. Because he was truly concerned for everyone, he treated them with understanding, caring, and extreme consideration."

From Rav Mordechai Schwab; A Tzadik In Monsey, By Yehoshua Schwab, Published by Adir Press

E. TO PRAY BEFORE EVERY MEAL FOR SUSTENANCE

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-36

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Zohar teaches that it is a profound mitzvah for an individual to direct his prayers to Hashem for his daily sustenance before partaking of his morning and evening meals. When reciting the verse: "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in its due season" (Tehillim 145:15), a person should lift his eyes toward Heaven and open his palms like an impoverished beggar beseeching the Creator, acknowledging that all nourishment flows exclusively from His boundless grace.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Why do the Sages teach that a person should pray for sustenance and thank Hashem before eating every day, rather than praying once a year for an annual supply? On Yoma 76a and in Yalkut Shimoni (735:2), the disciples of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him: 'Master, why didn't the manna in the wilderness fall once a year so the Israelites would have their pantries full all year long?' Rabbi Shimon answered them with a heartwarming parable: 'There was once a mortal King who assigned his beloved son a generous annual allowance to cover all his needs for the year. The result was that the son visited his father only once a year on the day the allowance was paid! Seeing how much he missed his son's company, the King changed the arrangement and decreed that the prince's allowance be given to him freshly every single morning. From then on, the son came to greet and speak with his father every day! So too, praying before we eat each day turns our daily bread into a daily conversation with our Father in Heaven.'

Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 735:2 (cf. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 76a)

F. NOT TO EAT BEFORE DAVENING

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Negative 106

As it says, You shall not eat over blood (Vayikra 19:26, Parshas Kedoshim),

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

From the scriptural verse, "You shall not eat over the blood" (Vayikra 19:26), our Sages derived an injunction forbidding a person from consuming any meat of a slaughtered animal before its life has completely departed (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 63a).

Through the Oral Tradition, Chazal likewise derived from this verse that one is forbidden to partake of food or intoxicating drink in the morning prior to reciting the morning prayers (Shacharis), for a person must not attend to his physical sustenance before he has prayed for his soul and life (Talmud Bavli, Berachos 10b). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• In his interpretation of "You shall be holy" (Kedoshim tihyu), the Sfas Emes confronts an apparent difficulty: if people withdraw from worldly activity to focus on holiness, how will ordinary life continue? He answers by reversing the assumed relationship. Nature survives precisely through submission to its source. Shabbos is the clearest evidence: Israel ceases productive activity, yet that very cessation sustains the days of action. The physical world is not damaged by being subordinated to Hashem; it is strengthened because its real divine life-force (chiyus) comes from beyond nature. The maamar applies this principle to each new day. This source adds a daily-time structure absent from some related passages. Its focus is spiritual renewal (hischadshus) each morning and the perpetual priority of the hidden root over the apparently durable natural body (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Kedoshim 5643).

• The Sfas Emes discusses the Torah's placing side by side of the sin of the spies with the commandments of wine libations and challah. Entering Eretz Yisrael meant confronting a material world that contained a mixture of good and evil; its conquest and its food alike needed spiritual clarification (birur). The spies' deeper mistake was the assumption that they could achieve the task through their own powers rather than through the Divine inner will (ratzon). Against this background he turns to the ordinance of eating only after tefillah and offers a particularly direct reason: eating is a spiritual battlefield (achilah hi milchamah) in which the soul must elevate the sparks within physical nourishment. Therefore it is forbidden to eat before prayer: morning prayer arms the soul so that it can clarify and elevate its food toward holiness (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Shelach 5651).

• The Sfas Emes begins with "Behold, I rain down for you bread from Heaven" (hineni mamtir lachem lechem min ha-shamayim) and explains the manna as a revelation of the Divine word sustaining every ordinary food. The wilderness generation received food in a form that was almost free of physical concealment: whereas contemporary bread holds its spiritual point beneath layers of matter, the manna made the source itself apparent. This does not mean the material world was abolished. Rather, the Israelites had been raised to a condition in which they could receive their nourishment as an expression of the utterance of Hashem's mouth (motza pi Hashem) with unusual directness. The maamar does not claim that one must consume literal manna before breakfast. It identifies an accessible pattern: Torah and tefillah first, bodily nourishment afterward, so that matter never becomes detached from the word that gives it life (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Beshalach 5639).

• The Sfas Emes begins with the verse “and he shall live by them” (va-chai bahem) and describes the formation of a human being in two movements. First, Hashem formed a body from earth, associated with the animal soul (nefesh ha-beheimis). Then Hashem breathed the breath of life into that body. The second stage makes the physical being a vessel capable of receiving higher vitality. This is the distinction he finds in the word human being (adam): the human being is not finished merely by possessing a natural, animal life. This teaching is distinct from the idea that eating is a battle of good against evil. Its focus is the very identity of the human being, the transition from bodily blood to life permeated by the higher soul (neshamah) (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Acharei Mos 5658).

• The halacha is stark: one may not eat before davening in the morning, and the gemara roots it in the pasuk "You shall not eat over the blood" — read, "Do not read over the blood, but rather over your own blood": do not eat before you have davened for your blood. The difficulty is obvious. Eating is not a sin; it is a necessity, and the Torah itself blesses it. Why should the body's legitimate need wait on the soul's account, and why would a pasuk in Kedoshim about blood and sorcery carry a law about breakfast? The Sfas Emes opens this derasha inside the parshah of “If you walk in My statutes” (be-chukosai teileichu, Bechukosai 5643), reading the whole mitzvah through his doctrine of the daily renewal. One who remembers the Torah at the beginning of everything can draw blessing that spreads and widens the Torah's light through his soul — and that is, that the walking happen through the mediation of the Torah (be-emtza'iyus ha-Torah) (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Bechukosai 5643).

G. NOT TO DO WORK BEFORE DAVENING

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 49-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden for a person to engage in his mundane labor, manage personal business affairs, or set out on a journey once dawn (alos hashachar) has arrived until he has first recited the morning prayer (Shacharis; Talmud Bavli, Berachos 14a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 89:3).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Zev was a hardworking Jew. He worked in a factory assembling furniture all day. His work required him to start at 8:00 every morning, so Zev would wake up early to daven before work. The halachah is that one is supposed to daven the Shemona Esrei after Netz, sunrise. However, if one has no other choice, one can daven after Alos, which is when the first light appears on the eastern horizon. Since Zev had to be at work so early he would often daven before Netz, particularly during the winter. Zev did this consistently for 25 years. He would get up early, daven, and then go to work. One day, Zev participated in a fundraising raffle. To his surprise he won the cash prize jackpot of one million shekels. Overnight he became a millionaire. This should have been a life altering windfall. But after the win, Zev's wife Etty sat down with him. "I know other people who suddenly became wealthy", she said. It changed their lives, and they became miserable after that. They lived with conspicuous consumption. They bought huge homes and cars. People were jealous of them, their relationships changed, and they must have gotten an ayin hara. Their win only brought them bickering, fights and jealousy. Let's make a promise between each other that even though we have become wealthy we won't change our lifestyle. Although you can technically retire and stop working, I'd like no one to know about our win, and I'd like you to continue to work as you have in the past. Let's not change anything about our lifestyle and

continue to work, and live simple, hardworking lives. I think in this way, our win will bring us baracha and not consternation and pain." Zev understood the wisdom of his wife's request and he emphatically agreed. Despite his wealth, Zev continued to get up early to daven and work the whole day. They lived simple, inconspicuous lives, and no one would have guessed that they were millionaires. One morning as Zev davened early, he wondered whether he was allowed to daven so early. In the past he had no choice but to daven before Netz. But now he didn't have to work anymore. He could wake up "late" and daven at sunrise. Was he allowed to daven so early, before the proper time, just to avoid changing his lifestyle after his win? On one hand maybe he should daven later, because he had no need to daven before the proper time. But on the other hand, it was really important to him and his wife not to change their simple lifestyle after their win. They did not want their win to become known and cause jealousy and create an ayin hara. Perhaps that was enough of a reason to daven before the proper time. This question was brought to Rav Chaim Kanievsky. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the worker who won a lot of money, but who wanted to continue to get up early to daven and work, Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered that he should daven at the right zman, and if he does so he should not be concerned about ayin hara or other negative consequences.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Upiryo Matok Shemos, p. 409

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Growing up in Brownsville, New York, Moshe was a bright yeshivah boy who asked penetrating questions, yet often felt brushed aside when told his questions were off-topic. Convinced that his rebbeim only pleaded with him to stay out of routine obligation—and that among so many future talmidei chachamim one boy would never be missed—he left yeshivah after eighth grade. Entering the business world as "Mark," he built a thriving enterprise while drifting away from mitzvah observance. When his beloved father passed away, Mark donned a yarmulke out of respect and promised himself he would always recite Kaddish on his father's yahrtzeit, even though he declined his former classmates' warm offers to learn together. Decades later, while traveling on business on his father's yahrtzeit, Mark was directed to a small, aging shul. After welcoming him warmly, the elderly rav resumed a Chumash shiur on Yaakov Avinu mourning Yosef (Bereishis 37:35). "Why does the Torah say that all of Yaakov's sons and daughters rose to comfort him without recording a single word they spoke?" the rav asked. "Because they thought their sheer numbers—all twenty-two children standing around him—would console him for losing one son. Yet Yaakov refused to be comforted, because to a father, every single child is irreplaceable." The rav paused and added softly, "Some think the Almighty is content seeing so many wonderful Torah Jews. They do not realize how heartbroken our Father in Heaven is when even a single child wanders away and feels he has no place among His people." Tears filled Mark's eyes as the words pierced the exact rationalization he had carried since eighth grade. Realizing how deeply his Father in Heaven—and his own late father—yearned for his return, Mark recited Kaddish with overwhelming emotion. Flying home to New York the next day, he called his former yeshivah classmates to begin learning Torah again, embracing Shabbos, kashrus, and thrice-daily tefillah as a full baal teshuvah at the age of seventy.

A Touch of Warmth, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

H. TO SAY BARUCH HU UVARUCH SHEMO

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-17

As it says, "When I mention the name of Hashem, you should bring greatness to our G-d" (Devarim 32:3, Parshas Haazinu)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Midrash and Talmud expound the verse, "When I proclaim the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our God" (Devarim 32:3), teaching that whenever one hears the Holy Name of Hashem enunciated during the recitation of a blessing, one is obligated to respond with reverent acclaim: "Baruch Hu u'varuch Shemo" ("Blessed is He and blessed is His Name"; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 124:5).

I. TO SAY AMEN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-27

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person is obligated to respond "Amen" upon hearing any blessing recited by a fellow Jew. Our Sages expound the verse, "Open the gates, that the righteous nation which safeguards faith (shomer emunim) may enter" (Yeshayahu 26:2) — interpreting the phrase not only as "safeguarding faith," but homiletically as she'omrim amen ("those who faithfully answer Amen"), teaching that whoever responds Amen with wholehearted devotion merits that the heavenly gates of Gan Eden be opened before him (Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 119b).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes places the Mishnah and Midrash about answering Amen within the transition from the generation of the wilderness to the generation entering Eretz Yisrael. The earlier generation lived through open miracles and revelation. Its service was therefore marked by truth (emes) made visible in an unusually direct manner. The generation that would cultivate the land entered a different spiritual condition, one in which Hashem's presence had to be acknowledged through faith (emunah) amid the concealed rhythms of natural life. The linguistic similarity of truth (emes) and Amen expresses a transformation of the mode of service. The earlier maamar on Amen as self-nullification (bittul) treats the individual's unfinished striving; here the change of generations, the entry into the land, and the rise of the Oral Torah explain why such an enduring form of commitment is indispensable. It is the means through which revelation remains a living obligation when the initial light is concealed (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5641).

• The Sfas Emes quotes Chazal's teaching that the person who answers Amen in this world will answer in the world to come, then offers a deeper explanation of how this can happen. A human being (adam) who has achieved real spiritual heights must still remember that he stands outside further doors. The Midrash's image of "a door within a door" (deles lifnim mi-deles) expresses this endlessness: attainment is not the end of readiness, because the next opening lies beyond the current one. The attitude required at each door is self-nullification (bittul), humble willingness to be drawn toward a truth higher than one's present grasp. This mechanism is separate from collective consent or legal acceptance. It concerns the long-term durability of avodah, and the ability of sincere will to sustain and elevate concrete mitzvos that remain subject to ordinary human limitation (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5638).

• The Sfas Emes approaches Chazal's teaching that "the one who answers Amen is greater than the one who recites the blessing" (gadol ha-oneh Amen yoseir me-ha-mevareich) through a parable recorded by Chazal: the lesser troops engage the enemy in battle, but the mighty warriors achieve the final victory. Rather than merely asserting that one participant is more deserving than another, he relates this image to the difference between the visible activity of a mitzvah and the spiritual source that gives it enduring effectiveness. Human speech and action begin a process below; the decisive strength comes from its higher root in Heaven. He first explains that performing a mitzvah in this world can awaken a corresponding power of the higher soul (neshamah) above. It identifies a spiritual mechanism linking the human beginning with the higher completion. By answering Amen with wholehearted faith and will (ratzon), we draw down the supernal completion of the blessing from Above (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5657).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the Midrash's praise of the one who answers Amen through the scene in Ki Savo: the Levites spoke the curses and blessings, and the people responded Amen. Not everyone in the assembly had the understanding to distinguish every spiritual implication of what was proclaimed. Yet their answering was meaningful. Through their willing acceptance of the word spoken by people of greater attainment, even an ordinary participant could be drawn after truth (emes) and become part of the covenantal event. He extends this into an account of the human person. Answering Amen thus serves as a sacred bridge across every level of spiritual attainment, allowing the listener to bind his soul in faith to the blessing he hears (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5637).

• This annual continuation repeats the important contrast between visible truth (emes) and the deeper persistence of faith (emunah), but contributes a particular picture of unequal spiritual capacities within one people. The Sfas Emes explains that the Levites answered at one level, linked to the enduring voices of revelation at Sinai, while ordinary Israelites answered at a simpler level. The latter were nevertheless able to follow and become included through Amen. The response did not require every member of the nation to attain the same spiritual rank; it required willingness to enter a shared covenantal act. Even when individuals stand at different rungs of Torah understanding, answering Amen together unites the entire congregation inside a single covenantal blessing (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5643).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A teenage boy had undertaken a personal kabbalah (stringency) never to recite a blessing over food unless another person was present to answer Amen. While traveling alone on an intercity bus, he became thirsty and wished to drink a bottle of water. Having no observant Jewish passengers sitting nearby, he called his father on his cell phone and asked him to listen so he could answer Amen. His father asked, 'Why are you calling me long-distance? Just ask the bus driver sitting right in front of you to answer Amen!' The son replied, 'But the bus driver is an Arab non-Jew!' The father countered, 'So what? A non-Jew can say Amen too!' The boy wondered: What is halachically preferable—to have a non-Jew answer Amen in person, or to have his Jewish father answer Amen over the telephone?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that the Amen recited by a non-Jew is a completely valid and halachically recognized Amen. The Mishnah and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 215:2; Berachos 51b) rule that one answers Amen after a blessing recited by a non-Jew provided he pronounced Hashem's holy Name with reverence. By the same token, when a non-Jew hears a Jew praise the Master of the Universe and affirms it by answering 'Amen,' his response is a genuine affirmation of truth that endows the blessing with completeness. Furthermore, poskim debate whether answering Amen over a telephone line constitutes an optimal, direct response (since electronic signals and digital sound transmissions are not identical to a live,

direct acoustic voice, though many authorities permit it b'sha'as hadchak). Therefore, having the non-Jewish driver answer Amen in direct physical presence is a fully valid Amen that satisfies the boy's personal stringency without needing to rely on a phone call. (Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 321; cf. Chashukei Chemed, Eruvin 62a, p. 451)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 321 (and Chashukei Chemed, Eruvin 62a, p. 451)

J. TO ANSWER AMEN YEHEI SHMEI WITH ALL ABILITY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-40

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One must answer the sacred response of Kaddish — "Amen, Yehei Shemei Rabba mevorach l'alam u'l'almei almaya" — with all of his strength (b'chol kocho). The Zohar explains that this obligation is to be fulfilled in its most literal and comprehensive sense, engaging all of one's vocal power, physical limbs, and heartfelt concentration. Our Sages taught that whoever responds to Kaddish with complete intensity merits that even a severe decree decreed against him in Heaven is torn asunder, and even if his soul bears the grievous stain of heresy, this powerful sanctification of the divine Name brings about his atonement (Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 119b).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It was taught in a Braisa that Rabbi Yose said: Once I was walking along the road and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Eliyahu the Prophet, remembered for good, came and stood guard for me at the entrance, waiting until I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer, he said to me, 'Peace be upon you, my master!' and I replied, 'Peace be upon you, my master and my teacher!' He asked me, 'My son, why did you enter this ruin?' I replied, 'To pray.' He said to me, 'You should have prayed on the road.' I explained, 'I was afraid that passersby might interrupt me.' He answered, 'You should have recited the abbreviated prayer.' At that moment I learned three lessons from him: that one does not enter a ruin, that one may pray while traveling on the road, and that one who prays on the road recites an abbreviated prayer. Eliyahu then asked me, 'My son, what voice did you hear inside this ruin?' I told him, 'I heard a Heavenly Voice cooing like a dove and saying: Woe, that I have destroyed My House, burned My Sanctuary, and exiled My children among the nations of the world!' Eliyahu said to me: 'By your life and by the life of your head, not only at this moment does it say so, but three times every single day it proclaims this! Moreover, whenever Israel enters synagogues and study halls and responds Yehei Shmei HaGadol Mevorach ("May His great Name be blessed"), the Holy One, blessed be He, nods His head and says: Fortunate is the King Who is praised thus in His house! What remains for a Father Who has exiled His children, and woe to the children who have been exiled from their Father's table!'

Talmud Bavli, Berachos 3a

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Chazon Ish highly valued those who undertook to serve the Torah community. An incident at the outset of my public career showed me just how highly, though. I traveled to Bournemouth, England, for Rosh Hashanah of 5713 (1952) to collect money for Chazon Yechezkel Youth Village, which Zeirei Agudas Yisrael had established. In those days, many well-to-do people spent Yom Tov at resort hotels in the area. Prior to Ma'a'riv on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, I was invited to speak in the shul of one of these hotels. Those gathered responded to my speech with generous pledges. But when it came time for davening, I could not help but notice that the mechitzah was very questionable. Rather than daven with the

congregation, I opted for the seclusion of my room in the hotel. In addition to missing tefillah b'tzibbur, I failed to say Kaddish for my father, whose yahrtzeit falls on the first night of Rosh Hashanah. By the next morning, I had located a more suitable minyan. But because I had not recited Kaddish the night before, I forgot to recite it in the morning davening as well. In fact, the entire yahrtzeit of my father passed without my reciting Kaddish once. When I remembered my failure to recite Kaddish for my father, I was overcome with remorse. And I blamed my public activities, which had brought me to Bournemouth, for my failure to say Kaddish. In my despondent state I took my failure to say Kaddish for father as a sign from Heaven that I should abandon my activities. My resolve on that point was firm. Upon returning to Eretz Yisrael, I went to the Chazon Ish to inform him of my decision to abandon public affairs and the reason for it. I told him that I intended to return to the beis midrash from which I had been drafted for public service. After hearing my explanation for my decision, the Chazon Ish astonished me. "I do not accept what you said," he told me. "You did recite Kaddish!" I assumed that he had misunderstood me I once again repeated the story of what had happened to me in England, and added for emphasis, "I did not say Kaddish." It then became clear that the Chazon Ish had heard me clearly. For he said, "You are mistaken. You did recite Kaddish. What do you think is the purpose of reciting Kaddish on a parent's yahrtzeit? When a son sanctifies the name of Hashem in public he is causing pleasure and bringing honor to his parent's soul! What more pleasure to your father than what you did — forgoing your own personal comfort to travel to a foreign country, where you had to daven without a minyan on Rosh Hashanah as part of a mission on behalf of the public? There is no greater Kaddish than that!" Upon hearing those words from the Chazon Ish, my resolve to retire from public life dissolved entirely. That retirement would not take place, as it turned out, for another thirty-three years.

In Their Shadow, Vol. 1, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ During the era of the Ksav Sofer in Pressburg, a prosperous, G-d-fearing couple donated generously to the Pressburg Yeshivah with one special stipulation: that the yeshivah appoint a scholar to recite Kaddish year-round for departed souls who had left behind no one to say Kaddish for them. After the husband passed away, his widow faithfully maintained the arrangement until her business collapsed, leaving her penniless with two daughters of marriageable age and no dowry. When the annual payment fell due, the destitute widow came to the yeshivah in tears and begged the administrators not to discontinue the Kaddish for those forgotten souls, promising to repay the stipends whenever Hashem restored her livelihood. Deeply moved by her selflessness, the administrators assured her the Kaddish would continue unabated. As she stepped out of the yeshivah overflowing with spiritual joy, a distinguished elderly man with a radiant white beard greeted her warmly and asked about her plight. Hearing of her two unmarried daughters, he asked how much was needed for their dowries, wrote out a bank draft addressed to the director of the local Pressburg bank for the full sum, and had two yeshivah students—the future greats HaRav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and HaRav Yehudah Grunwald—sign as witnesses before vanishing down the street. The next morning, the anxious widow presented the note at the bank. The moment the bank director glanced at the handwriting and signature, he turned pale and collapsed in a dead faint! When revived in his office, he showed the widow a portrait on the wall—and she immediately identified it as the elderly gentleman who had signed the note in front of the two yeshivah witnesses. Trembling, the bank director paid out the entire fortune on the spot and explained: "That man was my late father, who passed away ten years ago. Last night he appeared to me in a vivid dream and said: 'Ever since you abandoned the Torah path, married a gentile, and stopped reciting Kaddish on my yahrzeit, my soul had no rest—until this righteous widow arranged for Kaddish to be recited in the yeshivah for abandoned souls! Tomorrow she will bring a note signed by my hand; pay her the full dowry for her daughters!'" Shaken to the core by the miracle, the director repented and returned to his ancestors' heritage.

Noble Lives Noble Deeds, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Dovid Silber, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Following the Arab riots in Eretz Yisrael in 5689/1929, Agudas Yisrael announced a special campaign to raise funds for the victims. Rav Elya Meir Bloch was asked to make the appeal in the town of Ponevezh, an undertaking which at that time involved a train journey of twelve hours from Telz. Arriving at Ponevezh when it was time for Minchah, Rav Bloch asked to

serve as shaliach tzibbur, since he was observing his mother's yahrzeit that day. The local Jews asked him in surprise, "If the Rosh Yeshivah has yahrzeit for his mother today, how could he travel on the train all day, without any opportunity to say kaddish?" (The train had left before the time for Shacharis.) The Rosh Yeshivah replied, "What, in your view, would my mother a"h prefer — that I say yisgadal v'yiskadash shemei Rabbah (may Hashem's great Name be great and sanctified) or that I act in a way that actually causes Hashem's great Name to become great and sanctified? I am sure that my mother has much greater satisfaction from my collecting money for the victims of the pogrom, for this is more important to her than saying kaddish." His disciples relate that upon his return to Telz he repeated this to them, because he wanted them to absorb a correct scale of values.

In Their Shadow, Vol. 2, By Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, Published by Feldheim Publishers

K. TO SAY PESUKEI DEZIMRA

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-11

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a praiseworthy mitzvah to chant the Verses of Praise (Pesukei D'Zimrah) within the synagogue with a pleasant, melodious voice and deep joy of the heart (Talmud Bavli, Berachos 32a). Once an individual recites the opening blessing of Baruch She'amar, he is strictly forbidden to interrupt with any extraneous speech whatsoever until the completion of the Shemoneh Esreh, with the sole exception of the specific halachically mandated communal prayer responses (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 51:4).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One morning, the minyan in which Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus was davening moved to a larger hall in the shul right before Yishtabach, however the Rav, who was utterly engrossed in his tefillah, didn't notice until the minyan had already begun 'Yotzer ohr. Loath to miss a single Kaddish or Borechu, he waited in the smaller room for a half-hour until another minyan formed that he was able to join for the remainder of davening. Similarly, during the period shortly after his marriage when he lived in Yerushalayim, he occasionally davened in the shteiblach, but did not follow the minyan's hasty pace. If a chazzan led a quick davening, Rav Shimshon would simply recite Pesukei d'Zimrah with one chazzan and join another minyan before "Yotzer ohr." If necessary, he would change to a third minyan for Shemoneh Esrei and a fourth for chazaras HaShatz!

From Rav Shimshon Pincus, published by Feldheim / ArtScroll

L. NOT TO TALK IN THE MIDDLE OF DAVENING

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-13

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One who speaks extraneous words between Yishtabach and the blessing of Yotzer Ohr commits a grievous transgression, and on account of such a sin a soldier in biblical times was turned back from the ranks of battle (Talmud Bavli, Sotah 44b). The same strict prohibition applies to speaking between the words "Amen, Yehei Shemei Rabba" and "Yisbarach," between Kaddish and Barechu, and between the various responses of Kedushah.

The Midrash (Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Zuta) relates that Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Yose recounted: "Once, while walking on the road, I encountered Eliyahu HaNavi leading four thousand laden camels. I asked him, 'What are these camels carrying?' He replied, 'They are laden with divine wrath and indignation to punish those who speak between Kaddish and Barechu, between two consecutive blessings, between sections of prayer, between Amen, Yehei Shemei Rabba and Yisbarach, and between the blessing of redemption (Ge'ulah) and the silent prayer (Tefillah).'"

Moreover, the prayers of one who interrupts with speech are rejected before Hashem, as Scripture rebukes: "Yet you have not called upon Me, O Yaakov, for you have grown weary of Me, O Yisroel" (Yeshayahu 43:22). In contrast, one who maintains vigilant silence and pours out his heart with unwavering concentration is assured that his prayers will not return empty, as Scripture proclaims: "You prepare their heart; You incline Your ear to listen" (Tehillim 10:17).

M. NOT TO INTERRUPT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AMIDAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-13

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One who speaks between Yishtabach and Yotzer Ohr bears an active sin in his hand, and on account of such an infraction a warrior was required to depart from the battle lines (Talmud Bavli, Sotah 44b). The same strict prohibition applies to conversing between "Amen, Yehei Shemei Rabba" and "Yisbarach," between Kaddish and Barechu, between the sacred verses of Kedushah, and most stringently of all, interrupting during the silent prayer of the Amidah.

The Midrash (Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Zuta) relates that Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Yose said: "Once, as I was journeying on the road, I encountered Eliyahu HaNavi accompanied by four thousand laden camels. When I inquired what they were bearing, he answered that they carried heavenly wrath and fury to punish those who speak between Kaddish and Barechu, between two consecutive blessings, between sections of the prayer service, between Amen, Yehei Shemei Rabba and Yisbarach, and between the blessing of redemption (Ge'ulah) and the Tefillah."

Furthermore, the prayers of one who interrupts are not accepted before Hashem, as Scripture laments: "Yet you have not called upon Me, O Yaakov, for you have grown weary of Me, O Yisroel" (Yeshayahu 43:22). Conversely, one who devotes his undivided attention to his prayers and guards his speech is assured that his tefillos will never return empty, as it is written: "You direct their heart; You cause Your ear to attend" (Tehillim 10:17).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man walked into shul for Shacharis carrying two cell phones and placed them on a side table near the entrance before joining the congregation. In the middle of the silent Shemoneh Esrei, both phones suddenly began ringing loudly, filling the sanctuary with discordant ringtones and completely shattering the concentration (kavanah) of the entire minyan. Because everyone was in the middle of their silent prayer, no one was able to walk over and turn them off. As soon as one phone stopped ringing, the second one went off, ringing persistently without end. Furious at the

repeated desecration of the tefillah, the gabbai stepped away from his davening, grabbed both ringing phones, walked outside the shul, and left them on the public sidewalk by the entrance. When the owner finished davening and went outside to retrieve his phones, they were gone—someone had stolen them off the street. The owner demanded that the gabbai reimburse him for the two stolen phones, while the gabbai insisted that the owner brought the loss upon himself by disturbing the entire congregation's prayers. Who is financially responsible? What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that it appears the gabbai is technically liable to pay for the two stolen phones. While the gabbai was entirely justified in removing the disruptive phones from the sanctuary to protect the congregation's kavanah, he was not permitted to place them in an unsecured public area where theft was practically certain. By actively removing them from a private building and leaving them exposed on a public street, he acted as a direct cause of loss (garmi). Other contemporary poskim disagree, arguing that since the owner created an unbearable public nuisance that violated the sanctity of the shul, the gabbai had the right to eject the nuisance from the premises, and the owner bears full responsibility for his own negligence.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 216

A man reads all the instructions printed in the siddur during Shemoneh Esrei. Is that an interruption (hefsek) that would require him to repeat the Shemoneh Esrei?

Answer: HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein addresses this exact case (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 434; Chashukei Chemed, Berachos 33a, p. 207), where a prison inmate praying Minchah from a siddur for the first time read aloud every word on the page—including all seasonal insertions (Zochreinu, Aneinu, Nacheim, Ya'aleh V'Yavo, Al HaNissim) as well as the printed halachic instructions (such as 'V'im shachach eino chozer'—'And if he forgot, he does not repeat'). Rav Zilberstein rules: (1) Reciting out-of-season prayer insertions by mistake (b'shogeg) does not constitute an interruption (hefsek), as ruled in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 108:12). (2) However, reading the printed halachic instructions (such as 'and if he forgot, he does not repeat') in the middle of a blessing is classified as a hefsek in the middle of a berachah (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 104 and Mishnah Berurah s.k. 25), which requires returning to the beginning of that specific blessing while still in the Amidah; nevertheless, once he has already completed his Shemoneh Esrei (le'achar she-siyem tefillaso), he does not have to repeat the Shemoneh Esrei (unless he mistakenly recited V'sein tal u'matar during the summer). (Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 434; Chashukei Chemed, Berachos 33a, p. 207)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 2, p. 434; Chashukei Chemed, Berachos 33a, p. 207

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It once happened that a pious man was standing in prayer (Shemoneh Esrei) along the road. A high-ranking Roman officer (hegemon) rode by and greeted him, and the pious man did not interrupt his prayer to return the greeting. The officer waited until the pious man finished his prayer, and then shouted angrily: 'Empty-headed fool! Is it not written in your own Torah: Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully — and yet when I greeted you, why did you not return my greeting? If I had cut off your head with my sword right then, who could have demanded your blood from my hand?' The pious man replied calmly: 'Please wait until I explain my words to you! If you were standing in front of a mortal king of flesh and blood speaking with him, and your friend came by and said hello to you, would you turn away from the king to answer your friend?' 'No!' said the officer. 'And if you did turn away from the king to answer your friend, what would they do to you?' 'They would cut off my head with a sword!' said the officer. The pious man said to him: 'Behold, is it not a clear Kal VaChomer? If you, standing before a mortal king of flesh and blood who is here today and tomorrow in the grave,

would never dare interrupt to answer a greeting — how much more so I, who was standing in audience before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, Who lives and endures for all eternity!' Immediately the officer was completely appeased, and the pious man departed to his home in peace!

Talmud Bavli, Berachos 32b–33a (64:30–65:2)

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ A very serious halachic question involving pikuach nefesh once arose, requiring an immediate ruling by the Chazon Ish —but at that moment, he was davening Shemoneh Esrei. Reb Shmaryahu approached and whispered in his uncle's ear, but not only did the Chazon Ish not stir, he didn't even hear him—he was conversing with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He approached again, this time speaking loudly, but to no avail. Finally, he had no choice but to physically take hold of the Chazon Ish to gain his awareness. Having heard the question, he gave his response and immediately returned to communion with his Creator.

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

N. TO LISTEN TO THE REPETITION IN ORDER TO SAY AMEN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37–2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

One is obligated to listen attentively to every blessing recited during the reader's repetition of the prayer (chazaras hashatz) by the prayer leader (shaliach tzibbur). If an individual answers without knowing which specific blessing was just completed, his response is halachically categorized as an "orphaned Amen" (amen yasom). Regarding this carelessness, our Sages sternly warned: "Whoever responds with an orphaned Amen, his children shall, Heaven forbid, become orphans" (Talmud Bavli, Berachos 47a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 124:8).

O. TO SAY KEDUSHAH WITH AN EXPRESSION OF YEARNING TO BE CLOSE TO HASHEM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 36–5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

When answering Kedushah with the proclamation of Kadosh ('Holy, holy, holy is Hashem of Hosts...'), one should lift his eyes toward heaven with deep concentration (kavvanah) and an ardent yearning to cleave (dveikus) to the Blessed Holy One.

8. To Recite the Shema Twice Daily

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 11 Sefer Chareidim 9–14, 12–16

As the Torah says and you shall speak of them… when you lie down and when you rise up (Devarim 6:7, Parshas Va'eschanan),

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is meant by when you get up and lie down?
- What are the parts of shema?
- Why are those parts significant?
- Are women obligated to say shema?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Scripture defines this obligation as being performed 'when you lie down and when you rise up' (Devarim 6:7) — which means at the standard time of retiring to sleep at night and the standard time of arising in the morning.

This recitation consists of three scriptural passages from the Torah: the first passage of Shema (Devarim 6:4–9); the second passage of V'hayah Im Shamoa — 'And it shall come to pass, if you will diligently listen' (Devarim 11:13–21); and the third passage of Vayomer — 'And Hashem spoke' (Bamidbar 15:37–41).

The first passage encapsulates the foundational affirmations of Hashem's absolute Oneness and singular sovereignty, the commandment to love Him with all one's heart and soul, and the obligation of Torah study — which serves as the central anchor upon which all of Judaism depends.

The second passage embodies the solemn acceptance of the yoke of all the other commandments (ol ha-mitzvos), affirming individual and communal responsibility alongside divine reward and retribution.

The third passage, which commands the attachment of tzitzis (fringes), incorporates the active remembrance of all the divine commandments. In addition, it includes the mitzvah to recall the Exodus from Egypt, as the Torah commands: 'That you may remember the day you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life' (Devarim 16:3).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men, but women are exempt (as it is a positive time-bound commandment).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Krias Shema reminds us of the fundamentals of Judaism and about our mission on earth, which is to perfect ourselves and the world, and so come close to Hashem. This inspires us to commit ourselves to the Torah and develop a close relationship to Hashem.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 420)

Hashem knows the weakness of man and how easy it is to slip into sin. Therefore, twice a day we accept the yoke of Heaven (ol Malchus Shamayim). This helps us to realize that there is only one G-d who watches all that we do, and that all that we do should be to come close to Him.

RALBAG

Krias Shema contains mitzvos that are foundations of the whole Torah. We are to review these fundamental mitzvos twice a day.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:4)

The idea of Hashem being one has three implications. There is one Hashem in the world, all that happens and exists is from Hashem, and Hashem is single minded, so everything that exist and happens is for one purpose for us to have a relationship and be close to Hashem. Because of Hashem's oneness, and the oneness of the purpose of the universe, we accept to serve Hashem with everything that we have.

SFAS EMES

• Immediately after “Hashem is One” (Hashem Echad), the Torah commands: “And you shall love Hashem your God.” The question is well known: how can the Torah command a feeling? The Sfas Emes answers that the command is possible because the love already exists. He writes that at Matan Torah an inner love (ahavah) became planted within the Jewish soul. The mitzvah of "And you shall love" (ve-ahavta) is to uncover that love (ahavah) and allow it to emerge from concealment. Worldly desires can cover it, but they cannot destroy it. When the Jew says “Hashem is One” (Hashem Echad), the multiplicity that hides Hashem begins to fall away. The next natural movement is “And you shall love” (ve-ahavta): the love (ahavah) that was always present becomes revealed (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5647).

• The Torah commands Krias Shema: “when you lie down and when you rise up” (be-shochbecha u-ve-kumecha). The Sfas Emes explains why the mitzvah belongs specifically to these two transitions. The neshamah has a higher shoresh in which its attachment to Hashem is clear. It also descends into the body and this physical world (Olam HaZeh), where that divine unity (achdus) becomes concealed. The two daily Shemas correspond to this movement of ascent and descent. Morning begins the soul’s movement into active bodily life. Before entering the day, the Jew awakens the love (ahavah) and divine unity (achdus) of the higher shoresh and brings them downward. The divine unity (achdus) of Hashem must be declared both when His divine governance (hanhagah) appears illuminated and when it appears hidden. Morning and evening together testify that the change (shinui) belongs to our perception and circumstances; Hashem remains One (echad) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5661).

• Commenting on the verse “A great voice that never ceased” (Devarim 5:19) at Matan Torah, the Sfas Emes explains that the inner voice (kol) of Sinai never stopped echoing. Reciting Krias Shema twice daily gives a Jew the power “so that they may continually hear the living voice proclaiming: I am Hashem your God.” The daily recitation of the Shema is therefore an act of renewed hearing. Hashem’s declaration “I am Hashem your God” (Anochi Hashem Elokecha) remains spiritually present, and the task of Israel is to become capable of hearing it. The mitzvah of Shema is therefore part of the continuity of Matan Torah. Revelation occurred once in history, but its inner voice (kol) enters Jewish life every morning and evening (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5657).

• In the opening paragraph of the Shema, the Torah commands: “And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart.” The Sfas Emes emphasizes the word today (ha-yom). Chazal teach that the words should be experienced each day as new. This is possible because Divine speech remains alive. The Ten Commandments (Dibros) of Sinai are not dead historical sentences. The words of Hashem are living and

enduring (divrei Hashem chayim ve-kayamim). The words remain spiritually present, and Krias Shema provides the daily opportunity to receive them anew. The goal is "upon your heart" (al levavecha). Torah can exist in the memory or intellect while remaining external to the deepest patterns of the person. Their repetition is not a concession to forgetfulness. It is the process by which living words penetrate ever more deeply (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5644).

• Chazal explain "with all your soul" (be-chol nafshecha): "even if He takes your very soul." The Sfas Emes connects this directly to the word Oneness (echad): True divine unity (achdus) requires mesirus nefesh. The reason is clear within the Sfas Emes's conceptual system. The strongest expression of separation and division (peirud) is the feeling that the self possesses an independent existence and inner will (ratzon). To enter fully into the truth of "Hashem is One" (Hashem Echad), the independent inner will (ratzon) of the self must become subordinate to Hashem. This does not mean that every recital of Shema requires imagining physical death in a narrow sense. Rabbi Akiva's death with Oneness (echad) on his lips represents the ultimate expression of a practice that he had lived every day through Krias Shema. Thus "with all your soul" (be-chol nafshecha) brings the proclamation of divine unity (achdus) into the deepest possession a person has: his own soul (nefesh) (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5643).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the different understandings of the term Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad:
- He is our Hashem because he is one
- Now he is our Hashem but one day he will be the G-d of all humanity
- Both Hashem-Chesed and Elokeinu — Din — are both from Hashem — Chesed

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ It was a fine spring day in the late 1950's when R' Nochum Dovid entered a suit store in Yerushalayim. He was browsing through the racks when he noticed a colonel in the Israeli army walk in the door. "Hey, what happened to you?" R' Nochum Dovid heard the store owner say. Startled, he turned to see the owner addressing the army officer. It was then that R' Nochum Dovid noticed that the colonel was wearing a kipah. "Did you fall on your head or something?" the store owner went on. "Since when do you wear a kippah?" The colonel gave the store owner a dignified look. "I have become a baal teshuvah." "Really? But you were so anti-religious! What could have happened to make you change your mind?" "Listen," the colonel said. "I'll tell you my story. "A few months ago, I was sent to lead a fleet of fifteen tanks in the Sinai into Egyptian territory. "My men were seasoned soldiers, and fully trained. We knew how to travel through the desert, and our mission was proceeding exactly as planned. "And then, out of nowhere, I spotted sixty Egyptian tanks. We were outnumbered! Not just that, but each of their tanks was faster and more powerful than any one of ours. "I could see no way out for us. This was it! It would only be a matter of minutes before they spotted us and attacked. "I called the men together. 'I'm afraid this is the end for us. Everyone is on his own now. I'm sorry to let you down, but there's nothing I can do to help us.' "'Are you giving up?' a voice called. "Startled, I turned to see who was speaking. A chassid with peyos and tzitzis had stood up in the middle of the group. "'Listen, if you're giving up, then permit me to take charge.' "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I also couldn't understand his confident attitude. What did he see that I was missing? There was no way out of our situation. "Still, I was impressed by his confidence. And after all, what did we have to lose? So I put it to the others. "'Should we let him take charge?' "Sure, why not?' they agreed. "'Here's your instructions, then,' the chassid told us. 'We will go full force ahead. When I give the signal, everyone will scream with all his might and concentration, 'Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad!' Then shoot your first round of ammunition. "'With the help of the Ribbono Shel Olam, we will survive.'

"Everyone got into position, and the tanks started moving. The chassid gave the signal, and everyone screamed, 'Shema Yisrael!', following it with a round of fire. "When the smoke cleared, we saw an amazing sight. All sixty Egyptian tanks had stopped where they were, and the leader had raised the white flag. "I couldn't figure out what had happened, but I didn't want to lose the opportunity. I quickly took back command of the unit and I announced in Arabic that all the Egyptians should leave their tanks with their hands up. "The men all walked out of their tanks and began to come towards us. Their commander was leading, still holding the white flag. '"You see!' I said triumphantly to the commander, when he came close enough. 'We are more powerful than you!' "'Don't be ridiculous,' he snapped. 'How can you be more powerful? We have sixty tanks, and you have only fifteen. We caught sight of you in the distance, and we came here just to finish you off.' "'So, why didn't you?' I wanted to know. "The Egyptian commander glanced up at the sky. 'We saw those twenty airplanes flying above us. There was no way we could have withstood them. They would have destroyed us completely! So we gave up."' The colonel looked steadily at the store owner. "I looked up in the sky, and I didn't see any airplanes. Later on, I checked with the army. There hadn't been any airplanes in that area at the time. Hakodosh Baruch Hu had shown them those planes to save our lives. "I have seen the hand of Hashem with my own eyes. How could I not believe in Hashem and not follow in His ways?"

Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers

❖ After World War II, the Polish government, in a humanitarian gesture, allowed survivors to travel at no charge to look for families and relatives. Shifra Yudasin, along with Ida Fass, used this dispensation to visit towns and cities, recruit lonely, despairing girls, and organize them into Bnos groups. She also marshaled financial assistance for the more permanent tenants of the kibbutz. In this effort, she was helped mainly by Va'ad Hatzalah, through Rabbi Silver, and the great benefactor, Reb Nuteh Parness, who was always ready to assist every facet of kibbutz life with funds, advice, and encouragement. Now it became the daunting responsibility of this kibbutz, other kibbutzim, individual members, and unaffiliated people to redeem and reclaim Jewish children from gentile homes. An example of a person unaffiliated with political Jewish organizations was Rabbi Shalom Pinchas Wohlgelernter, an American Army captain who, as a representative of the Va'ad Hatzalah, visited survivors in the American Zone to bring them supplies. The most important provisions he delivered were encouragement and warm understanding. After touring the DP camps in Germany, Rabbi Wohlgelernter went on to Eastern Europe to rescue Jewish children from gentiles. He spent most of his time in Poland, where many stories about his exploits circulated. According to one of them, he visited a Polish convent and asked the sisters if there were any Jewish children in their childcare center. Although the nuns received him with respect as an American Army captain, they answered his question with a firm "No." He asked to see the children - a request the nuns could not refuse, since he was a uniformed American officer - and to have them lined up. Observing several distinctive Jewish faces among them, he cried out lovingly and passionately, "Shema Yisrael! Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad." Many of the children burst into tears and ran to him. "Our parents used to tell us that at home!" they exclaimed. Having confirmed these children's Jewishness, Rabbi Wohlgelernter was able to remove them from the convent and deliver them to the survivors' kibbutzim. There, the children were placed in various kinderheime organized by Agudah and Po'alei Agudah activists and led by our Bais Yaakov girls and teachers.

Carry Me in Your Heart, By Pearl Benisch, p. 393

A. NOT TO INTERRUPT IN THE MIDDLE OF SHEMA

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-12

SEFER CHAREIDIM

During the recitation of Krias Shema and its accompanying blessings, strict restrictions govern verbal interruptions (hefsek): in the middle of a section (b'emtza haperek), one may initiate a greeting only to someone he fears (such as an intimidating authority) and respond out of respect; between sections (bein haperakim), one may initiate a greeting out of respect and respond to anyone who greets him. The Maggid Mishneh writes that according to most halachic authorities, reciting the Complete Hallel (Hallel Hashalem) carries these identical stringencies of Krias Shema; conversely, on days such as Rosh Chodesh when Hallel is abridged, even the middle of a section carries the more lenient status of being between sections.

It follows that the section from Baruch She'amar until the conclusion of Yishtabach (Pesukei D'Zimrah) possesses the stringent status of reciting the Complete Hallel, for Rabbi Yose declared: 'May my portion be among those who complete Hallel every single day' (Shabbos 118b), which Chazal interpret as referring to the daily Psalms of Praise from Tehillah L'David (Ashrei) until the conclusion of Tehillim. Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach are designated as the formal blessings instituted immediately preceding and following this daily praise.

B. DURING SHEMA TO PLEDGE TO DO ALL THE MITZVOS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-43

As it says, You shall place these words on your heart (Devarim 11:18, Parshas Eikev)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture commands: 'Therefore you shall place these words upon your heart' (Devarim 11:18). This establishes an obligation for a person to consciously take upon himself the yoke of the commandments (ol ha-mitzvos) while reciting the second passage of Krias Shema (V'hayah Im Shamoa). As the Mishnah teaches in tractate Berachos (13a): Why does the passage of Shema precede V'hayah Im Shamoa? So that one should first accept the yoke of Heaven's sovereignty (ol Malchus Shamayim), and only afterward accept the yoke of the commandments (ol ha-mitzvos). The biblical phrase 'placing upon your heart' denotes an internal commitment, as exemplified by Daniel: 'And Daniel resolved upon his heart that he would not defile himself' (Daniel 1:8). Rabbeinu Yonah further notes regarding the verse, 'Cursed be he who does not uphold (lo yakim) the words of this Torah to perform them' (Devarim 27:26), that Scripture does not say 'who does not perform,' but rather 'who does not uphold and commit to them.' This demonstrates that one who refuses to accept the universal obligation of the mitzvos upon himself incurs severe spiritual liability.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Although a groom is halachically exempt from reciting the Shema on the first night after his wedding because his mind is preoccupied with the mitzvah of marriage, it once happened that Rabban Gamliel recited the Shema on the first night after he married. His disciples asked him, 'Our teacher, did you not teach us that a groom is exempt from reciting the Shema on the first night?' Rabban Gamliel replied to them, 'I will not listen to you to cast off from myself the Yoke of the

Kingdom of Heaven even for a single hour.'

Mishnah, Berachos 2:5

C. TO MENTION YETZIAS MITZRAYIM IN THE DAY AND NIGHT

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-24,25, 12-11

As it says "you should remember this day that you have left from the land of Egypt" (Shemos 13:3 Parshas Bo).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the consequence of recalling the exodus?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person is obligated to remember daily in his heart that we were enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt with crushing labor, with mortar and bricks, and that had the Holy One, blessed be He, not redeemed us, we and our children would remain subjugated. As Scripture states: 'Remember this day in which you came out of Egypt' (Shemos 13:3), and it is written: 'And He brought us out from there' (Devarim 6:23). As the Passover Haggadah proclaims: 'In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he personally went out from Egypt' (Pesachim 116b). The internal spiritual outcome of this contemplation is that one recognizes he is not an autonomous free agent to pursue his own whims, but a servant of Hashem, as taught in Pirkei Avos: 'You are not a free man to desist from it' (Avos 2:16).

While foundational remembrance begins in the heart, our Sages derived from the verse, 'That you may remember the day you came out of the land of Egypt' (Devarim 16:3), that there is an explicit obligation to articulate the Exodus verbally with one's mouth. This verbal articulation serves to awaken and reinforce the heart's awareness, for 'the Merciful One desires the heart' (Rachmana liba ba'i; Sanhedrin 106b).

Just as it is a mitzvah to remember the Exodus during the day, so too is it a mitzvah to remember it at night, as expounded in the first chapter of tractate Berachos (12b): "All the days of your life' (Devarim 16:3)—'the days of your life' refers to the days, while 'all the days of your life' includes the nights.' We must recognize that the Egyptian bondage and Hashem's miraculous redemption encompassed both night and day.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:4)

Yetzias mitzraim, the exodus from Mitzraim was a great spiritual tikun for Yisrael because it purified us forever. Ever since the chet of adam and man first internalized ra, ra strengthened and it left little room for tov to strengthen. That ra affected Yisrael and prevented them from getting the shleimus that they were destined for. So Hashem purified Yisrael in the cur habarzel of mitzraim, and when we were taken out of mitzraim we were eternally lifted out of that choshech and we were henceforth davuk to Hashem. When we mention yetzias mitzraim, we strengthen the ohr or yetzias mitzraim and we further purify ourselves.

SFAS EMES

• Both the Midrash and the Zohar connect the meeting of Yehudah and Yosef ("And Yehudah approached him") to adjoining redemption to prayer (semichas ge'ulah le-tefillah). How do the two brothers map onto joining redemption to prayer? The Sfas Emes teaches that the word melech (king) is an acronym for mind, heart, and liver (mo'ach, lev, kaveid): mind the aspect of soul, heart of spirit, liver of life-force — and the essence of the war is in the heart: "To man belong the arrangements of the heart" (le-adam ma'archei lev). This is service of the heart (avodah she-ba-lev), prayer, the aspect of Yehudah and of David, and the heart knows and feels the distress of the soul and the body. And this is "Hear O Israel" (Shema Yisrael) — hearing is in the mind — joined to prayer, which is in the heart that has ascended to it (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayigash 5665).

• In this short but densely structured maamar, the Sfas Emes quotes a teaching of his grandfather: the many expressions of Moshe's petitions during the ten plagues, including "and he cried out" (va-yitz'ak) and "and he entreated in prayer" (va-ye'ater), correspond to the repair of ten languages of prayer. The premise is that Egyptian bondage affected not only the bodies of Israel but the very faculty of sacred speech (dibbur). The Jewish mouth had been in exile, incapable of its intended service. The redemptive process therefore had to bring speech itself out of captivity before it could become a vehicle for praise, Torah, and petition. The Sfas Emes draws an immediate conclusion: this is why geulah must be attached to tefillah. Because the Exodus liberated the ten expressions of prayer from Egyptian exile, we immediately join the blessing of redemption to the Amidah ("O Hashem, open my lips") (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Shemos 5653).

• In his 5631 discourse on Parshas Va'eschanan, the Sfas Emes examines the Midrashic contrast between prayer, whose gates are sometimes closed and compared to a mikveh (a gathered pool of water), and repentance, whose gates are always open like the sea. He explains that a mikveh represents the gathering of separate waters into one designated place: in the service of the heart (tefillah), a Jew must first gather all his scattered desires and nullify himself toward the inner point of holiness implanted within his soul. Adjoining the remembrance of the Exodus directly to the Amidah (semichas ge'ulah le-tefillah) awakens that inner point of freedom, enabling us to gather our thoughts and hearts into a pure vessel before standing in prayer before Hashem (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

• The Sfas Emes reads the warning against fearing enemy horses and chariots through the difference between worldly warfare and the Jewish form of strength. Other nations depend on the sheer visible power of a horse and rider. Israel's real power comes from the higher soul (neshamah) directing the body rather than serving it. He interprets the chariot imagery as an account of the inner person: the body is the horse, while the soul is the rider. The Exodus taught Israel a new order of mastery, because Hashem fought for them when they subordinated their power to Him. The key distinction is between the human body as equipment for holy struggle and the body as the ruler of that struggle; Krias Shema restores the proper order (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Shoftim 5653).

• Continuing his 5631 exposition on Parshas Va'eschanan, the Sfas Emes explores why the Midrash links the laws of prayer and adjoining redemption to the Amidah (semichas ge'ulah le-tefillah) with the focal direction of prayer toward the Sanctuary. Just as all prayers ascend through the gateway of Jerusalem and the Holy of Holies, every individual's private supplications must first be connected to the collective redemption of Klal Yisrael. By reciting the blessing of Ge'ulah immediately before the Amidah, a Jew steps out of private isolation and anchors his personal requests within the eternal covenant of the redeemed nation (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ As young Moshe grew up in the royal palace, Pharaoh's daughter Batyah used to kiss and hug him, and Pharaoh himself would bounce the child on his knees. One day, little Moshe reached up, lifted the royal crown right off Pharaoh's head, and placed it upon his own head — just as he was destined to do when he grew up! Pharaoh's astrologers and Bilam the magician sat watching in alarm and cried out: 'We are terrified that this boy who takes your crown and puts it on his own head is the very redeemer who will overthrow your kingdom! Let him be put to death!' Others among the royal advisors (Yitro) said: 'He has no understanding yet — he is just a small child chasing shiny things! Test him before you judge him: place before him a bowl containing a gleaming jewel (onyx) and a glowing red coal. If he reaches out his hand and grabs the jewel, he has adult scheming intelligence — execute him; if he reaches for the glowing coal, he has no ulterior motive — leave him alive!' They immediately brought the jewel and the glowing coal before him. Baby Moshe reached out his hand to grab the gleaming jewel, when the angel Gavriel came, pushed Moshe's hand aside so that he grabbed the burning coal instead, and guided his hand with the coal to his mouth, burning his tongue! That is how Moshe's life was spared in Pharaoh's court, and how he became 'slow of speech and slow of tongue' (kvad peh u'chvad lashon).

Shemos Rabbah 1:26

D. WORDS OF SHEMA OR TORAH SHOULD BE THE LAST THING ON ONE'S LIPS BEFORE HE GOES TO SLEEP

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-23

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

A person should transition directly into sleep immediately following words of Torah study or the recitation of the Bedtime Shema (Krias Shema al Hamitah), without interjecting mundane conversation between his sacred words and his rest. As Scripture states: 'Commune with your heart upon your bed, and be silent, Selah' (Tehillim 4:5) — where 'silence' refers to drifting peacefully into sleep while one's mind remains bound to divine contemplation.

E. TO JOIN REDEMPTION TO PRAYER (SOMECH GEULAH LETEFILLAH)

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-9

SEFER CHAREIDIM:

One is strictly forbidden to make any verbal interruption between concluding the blessing of redemption (Ga'al Yisrael) and beginning the Amidah, for the juxtaposition of redemption to prayer (semichas geulah l'tefillah) must remain seamless. In a parallel manner, one must not make any verbal interruption between fastening the hand-tefillin (shel yad) and placing the head-tefillin (shel rosh) — not even to answer Kaddish or Kedushah.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• On the verse "And what great nation is there" (u-mi goy gadol), the Midrash says of one who reads the Shema and joins ge'ulah to tefillah: upon this the verse declares, "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as Hashem our God is whenever we call upon Him!" (Devarim 4:7)—for Hashem is simultaneously infinitely exalted and intimately near. The Sfas Emes explains through the phrase "whenever we call upon Him" (be-chol kor'einu eilav): a person can draw near and reveal the concealment, so that the honor of Hashem — which fills the whole earth — becomes revealed to him. This is also why Shabbos carries the command "and you shall remember" (ve-zacharta) — "You were a slave" (eved hayisa), and why the Kiddush of the day is a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt (Yetzias Mitzrayim): the redemption (ge'ulah) is the Shabbos-ness itself, in which Israel testify that all is from His life-force, who created in six days — and from that testimony the prayer of the seventh day flows without any gap at all (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5631).

• The Sfas Emes reads "And Yehudah approached him" (va-yigash eilav Yehudah) through the Zohar as a remez to joining redemption to prayer (semichas ge'ulah le-tefillah). He explains that the person has two central powers, mind (mo'ach) and heart (lev). Yosef represents the illumined mind and the freedom of the higher soul (neshamah), while Yehudah represents the heart engaged in a continuous battle with conflicting desires. The heart contains a wise heart (lev chacham) and the heart of a fool (lev kesil), and within ordinary life these are not automatically reconciled. The narrative of their meeting supplies a precise map of how the mind's freedom makes the heart's service whole. This is a direct spiritual interpretation of the liturgical adjacency, with an explicit attribution to the Zohar for the initial remez (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayigash 5660).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the verse "O My dove in the clefts of the rock, let Me hear your voice" (yonasi be-chagvei ha-sela hashmi'ini es koleich) through the history of the Exodus from Egypt (Yetzias Mitzrayim) and the Splitting of the Red Sea (Keri'as Yam Suf). Israel's capacity for speech and song was buried within the confinement of Egypt. The Exodus repaired the power of sacred speech (dibbur); the splitting of the sea brought the deeper power of inner voice (kol) into active expression. The people could finally sing the sacred song (shirah), giving outward form to something that had existed in the soul but could not yet emerge. Remembering the Exodus and the Song at the Sea immediately before the Amidah reawakens both our redeemed speech (dibbur) and our innermost voice (kol) so that true prayer can pour forth (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Pesach 5660).

• The Sfas Emes explains joining redemption to prayer (semichas ge'ulah le-tefillah) through a fundamental question about the purpose of prayer. If every mitzvah ultimately seeks to reveal Hashem's glory in the world, what is unique about tefillah? He answers that prayer is the heart's deliberate request for the hidden Divine kingdom to become more manifest, as it will be in the future. All good deeds express this desire indirectly; prayer gives it its direct form. That is why service of the heart (avodah she-ba-lev) is such a fitting description of tefillah: a person gathers the inner longing that his service has generated and turns it into a plea for fuller revelation. This is a direct spiritual explanation of the liturgical order, with its key distinction between existing cleaving to Hashem (dveikus) and the wider sovereignty of Heaven (malchus Shamayim) that we pray to see revealed throughout all creation (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5635).

• The Sfas Emes explains the sequence of praise and petition through the condition that makes a request genuine. Every human being has a positive duty to proclaim Hashem's glory according to his abilities. If one has not yet brought those existing powers to their proper use, a prayer for higher assistance remains insufficiently prepared.

When a person has arranged Hashem's praise faithfully, however, he reaches a boundary: the work still needed lies beyond his own capacities and can only come through help from Above. By first proclaiming Hashem's redemptive praises to the fullest extent of our ability, we prepare our hearts to ask humbly for the salvation that only Heaven can bestow (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Va'eschanan 5645).

9. The Priestly Blessing (Birkas Kohanim)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 58

As the Torah says, Thus you shall bless the children of Israel.… May Hashem bless you… May Hashem make His face shine upon you… May Hashem lift up His countenance… (Bamidbar 6:23-26, Parshas Nasso).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Is the kohen allowed to add an extra blessing?
- Is the kohen allowed to not go up when he is called up to bless?
- What happens to the kohen if he gives the berachah?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

If a kohen adds an additional blessing or verse of his own to the prescribed text of the Priestly Blessing, he violates the biblical negative prohibition of Bal Tosif: 'You shall not add to it' (Devarim 13:1).

If a kohen present in the synagogue fails to ascend the platform (duchan) before the Holy Ark to bestow the blessing when the shaliach tzibbur (prayer leader) calls out 'Kohanim,' he fails to fulfill this positive commandment and actively violates three distinct biblical directives: 'Thus shall you bless' (Bamidbar 6:23), 'Say to them' (Bamidbar 6:23), and 'So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel' (Bamidbar 6:27).

Conversely, every kohen who faithfully bestows this blessing upon the congregation receives divine blessing in return, as Scripture promises: 'And I will bless those who bless you' (Bereishis 12:3; Sotah 38b). This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for male kohanim.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Prayer inspires us to develop a close relationship to Hashem, by reminding us of the source of all the blessings that we have. This mitzvah is a communal prayer that reminds us of the true source of blessing. This deepens our relationship with Hashem, and so inspires us to perfect ourselves through Torah and mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:40)

This mitzvah has the same effect as Tefillin, and Birkas Hamazon. The kohanim are publicly educating and reminding us that Hashem is the true source of all our blessings.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 378)

The kohanim have great merit because they are servants of Hashem, who devote their lives to learning and teaching Torah. When they pray for us to receive blessing, Hashem will listen to their prayers and give us his blessings.

Additionally. Really Hashem is blesses us not the kohanim. But we can only receive blessing from Hashem based on our spiritual level. We turn to the kohanim to express that we should learn from the kohanim how to become spiritually fit to receive Hashem's blessings.

ALSHICH

The blessing of the kohanim serves to create the atmosphere to attune the heart of a Jew to be worthy of Hashem's blessings.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes gives an unusually broad explanation of why the Kohanim possess the ability to bless. Before the sin of Adam HaRishon, human beings existed on a vastly higher spiritual plane: “before the sin of Adam, the spiritual stature of Man was exceedingly exalted.” Sin caused humanity to descend from that position, yet Hashem left points within Creation—across space (olam), time (shanah), and the soul (nefesh)—through which the original shoresh remains accessible. The Kohen does not only bring more abundance into the present world. He draws from a higher human shoresh and allows a trace of that original stature to illuminate the world again (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5649).

• The three pesukim of Birkas Kohanim form a progression. The Sfas Emes maps them onto the three Avos and onto the spiritual structure of the human being. He writes explicitly: “the three verses of the Priestly Blessing correspond to three stages of elevating the body to nefesh, ruach, and neshamah.” The three blessings are three spiritual levels (madreigos) that raise the body into soul (nefesh), spirit (ruach), and higher soul (neshamah). The first blessing, “May Hashem bless you and guard you” (yevarechecha Hashem ve-yishmerecha) deals most directly with the outward and material level. Birkas Kohanim therefore addresses far more than material prosperity. It begins within ordinary physical life and progressively raises the recipient until his material existence, emotional-spiritual life, and neshamah become joined (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5651).

• The blessing requires an avodah from the Kohen, and the Sfas Emes also identifies an avodah belonging to Klal Yisrael. The Torah introduces the Priestly Blessing with the word amirah (“Say to them”). The Sfas Emes connects this gentle speech (amirah) with the verse “You have singled out Hashem today… and Hashem has singled you out today” (he'emarta ve-he'emircha, Devarim 26:17–18), which Chazal understand as forging one unique, unified bond (chativah achas). Gentle speech (amirah) in this context expresses connection. Bnei Yisrael must become batel to the Kohanim and believe that the root of blessing is entrusted to them; through this cleaving to Hashem (dveikus) they can receive blessing from them. A gift can stand ready and still fail to enter a closed vessel. Faith (emunah), self-nullification (bittul), and cleaving to Hashem (dveikus) create receptivity (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5650).

• The first principle is that true blessing cannot be understood entirely within the ordinary laws of the physical world. Every physical quantity can be measured. Material resources appear finite. The source of blessing (berachah) must therefore lie at a level deeper than the visible system into which the blessing eventually enters.

The Sfas Emes repeatedly connects this idea with Avraham Avinu. Avraham was told "Go forth from your land" and "I will bless you" (Bereishis 12:1–2), calling him to separate himself from dependence upon the ordinary order of the world. After the seven days of Miluim, Aharon lifts his hands and blesses the people. The blessing comes from a source that exceeds the limits of the seven-day world and can therefore enrich that world (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5649).

• The Torah places Birkas Kohanim after the parshah of Nazir. The Nazir separates himself from ordinary life and acquires a special level of kedushah. The Kohen likewise occupies a unique spiritual level (madreigah) within Klal Yisrael. The Sfas Emes uses this placing side by side to teach a fundamental rule about spiritual greatness. The Sfas Emes explains that Aharon placed all his power into the unified whole (klal). This self-nullification (bittul) to Klal Yisrael itself becomes part of his capacity to bless. The mitzvah therefore teaches a model of leadership and kedushah. The person raised above the community (tzibbur) receives his elevation in order to serve the community (tzibbur). His personal closeness becomes a public channel (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5645).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

▪ Discuss the idea of power of the prayer of a tzadik

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Why did Hashem command the Kohanim to stand, lift their hands, and bless the people with the three-fold Priestly Blessing ('May Hashem bless you and guard you...'), while the congregation listens with lowered eyes to receive the blessing directly from Heaven? In Midrash Tanchuma (Nasso 17:1), Rabbi Yehoshua of Sichnin in the name of Rabbi Levi told a heartwarming parable. A great King betrothed his daughter to the son of a respected citizen. When the wedding day arrived and the bride's father came to escort the princess in a grand procession to the bridal canopy, the King saw how radiant she was and how everyone along the avenue was staring at her in wonder. Turning to the father, the King said: 'As she walks through the streets to her new home, I worry lest the envy of onlookers harm her—so before you take a single step, let me place my own royal blessing of protection upon you: May God bless you and guard you!' So too, when Israel completed the Tabernacle and the Divine Presence came to dwell among them like a bride under the canopy, Hashem commanded the Kohanim to place His protective blessing upon the people every day.

Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso 17:1

A. A NON-KOHEN CANNOT PERFORM BIRKAS KOHANIM

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-19

To recite the three verses of Birkas Kohanim in the holy tongue

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages expounded the verse, 'Thus shall you bless the children of Israel' (Bamidbar 6:23), to mean: 'You' — the male descendants of Aharon — 'and not strangers' (non-kohanim). Consequently, a non-kohen is forbidden to ascend the platform and bestow the Priestly Blessing; and because this restriction is derived directly from a positive command, it carries the halachic status of a positive commandment (lav ha-ba miklal aseh).

B. THE KOHEN SHOULD LIFT HIS HANDS WHEN HE IS DOING IT

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 16-71

To recite the three verses of Birkas Kohanim in the holy tongue

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Should both hands be equally high?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing (Birkas Kohanim) must be performed with the elevation of the hands (nesias kapayim), as Chazal derived from the phrase 'Thus shall you bless' (Bamidbar 6:23) that the blessing must be accompanied by outstretched hands. Scripture likewise records: 'And Aharon lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them' (Vayikra 9:22). Because the scriptural text spells 'his hands' in the singular form (yado), a kohen should elevate his right hand slightly higher than his left — a practice that is also deeply grounded in the Kabbalistic tradition.

C. THE KOHEN SHOULD STAND DURING THE BERACHAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 18-13

D. TO RECITE THE THREE VERSES OF BIRKAS KOHANIM IN THE HOLY TONGUE

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing must be performed exclusively while standing upright, as received through the authoritative Sinaitic tradition expounding the words 'Thus shall you bless' (Bamidbar 6:23) — establishing that this sacred service may be delivered only in an erect posture.

E. NOT TO LOOK AT THE KOHANIM WHEN THEY ARE SAYING THE BERACHAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 45-6

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Why not?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden for congregants to gaze at the hands of the kohanim while they are outstretched in blessing, out of profound reverence for the Shechinah (Divine Presence) that rests upon their fingers (Chagigah 16a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 128:23). This prohibition remains fully in effect today.

A person must meticulously adhere to these foundational principles of reverence and holy conduct whenever standing in prayer before Hashem.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Prayer inspires us to develop a close relationship to Hashem. It also is a time to remind ourselves of the fundamentals of Judaism and about our mission on earth, which is to perfect ourselves and the world. The following mitzvos help to make our prayer experience as effective inspirational and as possible, so that we are truly inspired through tefillah to come close to Hashem by perfecting our character through Torah and Mitzvos.

10. The Rabbinic Mitzvos of Prayer: Minyan, Shul, and Kavanah

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a commendable mitzvah to hasten and run eagerly to the synagogue (beis knesses), to the house of study (beis medrash), and toward the performance of any divine commandment. One is even permitted to run for this sacred purpose on Shabbos, as Scripture proclaims: 'Let us know, let us run eagerly to know Hashem' (Hoshea 6:3).

A. TO DAVEN WITH A MINYAN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-10

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinically mandated mitzvah of supreme importance to pray alongside a communal quorum (minyan) of ten men, ensuring that one's personal supplications are joined to the collective prayers of Klal Yisroel.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The verse “You are standing today, all of you” (atem nitzavim ha-yom kulchem) becomes, in the Sfas Emes's reading, a statement about what happens whenever a Jew joins the unified whole (klal). The people of Israel remain eternally standing before Hashem because the words of the Torah and their covenant are not exhausted by one historical occasion. By actively including himself in the community, an individual enters that enduring position. The Sfas Emes says that the purpose of service of the heart (avodah she-ba-lev) is to bring oneself into this collective standing. Joining the congregation in prayer binds the individual soul to the eternal standing of all Klal Yisrael before Hashem (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Nitzavim 5638).

• The Sfas Emes begins with the verse "And as for me, may my prayer to You, Hashem, be at a time of favor" (va-ani sefillasi lecha Hashem eis ratzon), recited at Shabbos Minchah, and asks what makes the hour a time of favor. His reading turns the expected cause and effect around. It is not only that Jews are invited to pray when a favorable hour already exists. He quotes Chazal's teaching, "When is it a time of Divine favor? Whenever the congregation prays together" (eimasai eis ratzon ke-she-ha-tzibbur mispallelin), and explains that Israel's own communal prayer awakens the time of Divine favor (eis ratzon). Their directed longing becomes part of the reason the moment is spiritually open. When the congregation unites in prayer, their shared longing awakens a time of Divine favor (eis ratzon) and draws renewed spiritual life-force (chiyus) into the coming week (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Chukas 5634).

• Interpreting "and he encountered the place" (va-yifga ba-makom) and Yaakov's institution of Maariv, the Sfas Emes contrasts the recurring moments of prayer with the spiritual darkness that surrounds human life. Shacharis and Minchah are established opportunities when a ray of illumination appears in the ordinary world. When people pray together at such a time, their fiery enthusiasm (hislahavus) reveals a time of Divine favor (eis ratzon) and the forces of concealment are driven back. He connects this with the shepherds gathering at the well, moving the stone, and exposing the living water concealed beneath it. Here the focus is on revealing light and moving the stone of concealment. This interpretation also preserves the special contribution of Yaakov and Ma'ariv rather than treating all three tefillos as an undifferentiated institution (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayeitzei 5648).

• The Sfas Emes interprets the willow branch (aravah) of Hoshana Rabbah as a symbol of spiritually weaker generations, those who seem to possess little recognizable learning or mitzvah achievement. He recalls the Midrash's comparison of the four species with different kinds of Jews and argues that the history of the nation must be seen as one continuous building. The earlier generations prepared spiritual assistance for later ones, and the present generation draws upon their achievements through participation rather than by pretending to equal them. He quotes the Midrash's assurance that Hashem did not despise the prayer of later generations. Just as the Four Species join every type of Jew into a single bundle on Sukkos, uniting with a minyan in prayer allows each individual to be uplifted by the collective merit of the congregation (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5665).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A man was walking toward a synagogue to serve as the essential tenth man needed for a communal prayer minyan. Right before entering, he was approached and desperately asked to serve as the required tenth man for a wedding chuppah that could not begin without him. Which mitzvah takes priority: completing the minyan for communal prayer, or completing the minyan for the bride and groom under the chuppah?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that he should go to complete the minyan at the chuppah rather than the synagogue prayer minyan. While communal prayer is a great mitzvah, in a situation of pressing loss one can still fulfill the obligation of prayer individually. By contrast, without ten men at the chuppah, the Sheva Brachos (Nissuin blessings) cannot be recited and the bride remains forbidden to the groom. Moreover, Chazal teach (Megillah 3b) that even Talmud Torah is suspended for hachnasas kallah, demonstrating its overriding priority.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Bava Basra, p. 90

Yair was a secular student who went to an Israeli public school. Over time, when he was in 12th grade, he decided to become more Torah observant. He slowly began keeping more of the mitzvos. Inspired by his growth, he organized a minyan for minchah in his high school. The minyan met during a recess break. He would call his friends and other students passing by to join the minyan. Of course there were occasional disruptions, and because it was a very secular environment, people who walked into the room to daven minchah were not always dressed appropriately. Nevertheless, Yair felt very happy that he was able to engage so many people to join the minyan who normally would not do so. As Yair began to grow a bit more, he had the following thought. Although it was certainly wonderful that he organized the minyan in school, perhaps it would be better if he davened in a shul. In the school he was able to engage more students, and he made a "Kiddush HaShem", but there were certain liabilities about doing it in the school. There were constant disruptions. The pictures on the walls were often inappropriate for davening. People walking in to the room or walking by were often dressed immodestly. If he would daven in shul, he would not have these liabilities. Perhaps he could even convince a few of his friends to join him to go to shul. Yair went to Rav Zilberstein and asked him what he should do. Should he continue his minyan in the public school, or should he daven minchah in shul?

Answer: Regarding the question of whether they should hold the minyan in the public school or in a shul, Rav Zilberstein answered that it would be best for them to have the minyan in the school in order to engage more people in the davening and make a Kidush Hashem. Of course they should try to find a room that can be most appropriate for davening.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Three, p. 129

There were once two members of a shul who came to daven Maariv, and each of them had a Yahrtzeit. The custom is that when someone has a Yahrtzeit, they lead the tzibbur, the congregation, as the chazzan, as an elevation of the neshamah of the deceased. Both were members of the shul, and both had a Yahrtzeit on the same night. They were trying to decide who should have the opportunity to lead. Chaim said, "You know what? Since we both have Yahrtzeits, let's split the minyan. There are 50 people in the shul. We'll divide the group, and each of us will lead our own minyan." But Dovid responded, "That's a good idea, but I'm not sure it's appropriate to split the minyan. There's a concept of b'rov am hadras melech, when more people come together to do mitzvos, it brings greater glory and honor to Hashem." He continued, "So I think splitting the group wouldn't be ideal. Maybe one of us should lead, and the other should be mevater, willingly give up the opportunity." They brought the question to a Rav. What do you think is preferred in a case like this? When two people have a Yahrtzeit, should the minyan be split so each can lead a smaller group? Or is it better to keep the minyan whole and have one person step aside, making that very act of yielding their mitzvah and creating a b'rov am hadras melech an elevation of the neshamah of the deceased?

Answer: Based on the Mishnah Berurah (150:2) and Sha'ar HaTziyun (150:3), Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that when a synagogue has a single congregation, they should not split into two separate small minyanim merely so two mourners with a yahrzeit can both lead the entire Maariv service, because praying together in one larger congregation fulfills the biblical glory of 'b'rov am hadras Melech'; instead, they should pray together as one minyan and divide the honors or prayers between the two mourners.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 214

We know that during the coronavirus epidemic in Eretz Yisrael, the authorities were very concerned about the virus spreading. Like many other authorities in different countries, they made rules restricting gatherings. At the beginning of the pandemic, when fear was at its highest, they prohibited gatherings of more than 10 people. Instead of going to shul, people would daven in open areas, and they were only allowed to have a minyan of 10 people, no more. One day, in a certain area in Israel, a group of 10 gathered. They carefully kept social distance and followed all the regulations. As

they were davening, another person came, then another, and then another. No one said anything to the newcomers, and before they knew it, there were 20 people in the minyan. A government inspector passed by, saw the group of 20, which was against the rules, and gave every single person a fine of 500 shekels. After the inspector left, the first 10 turned to the second 10 and said: "We think you should pay for our fine. Instead of all of us paying 500 shekels each, you should each pay 1,000, because we were following the rules. You came and pushed us over the limit, so you're responsible for our fine." But the second 10 replied: "First of all, the inspector gave each of you the fine and did not care who came first. Also, it wasn't our fault. No one said anything to us, and we were all part of one minyan together. Any of the first 10 could have left if they wanted. The fact that you stayed shows that you consented. Therefore, we're not responsible for your fine, you should pay your own." They agreed to bring this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Does everyone have to pay their own fine as the inspector gave it, or should the second 10 people cover the fine for the first 10 and pay 1,000 shekels each instead of 500?

Answer: Regarding the question about the COVID minyan, Rabbi Zilberstein answered that the second group of 10 who joined the minyan are obligated to pay for the fine of the first ten because they caused the fine to be given. However, because this is a grama (an indirect action), they could not be forced by a human court (midinei adam), and they would have to pay m'dinei shamayim (according to the laws of Heaven).

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Four Hebrew Edition, p. 210

There was a certain shul in a small city in Eretz Yisroel. During the coronavirus pandemic, because the authorities forbade indoor gatherings, the shul began davening outside. Moshe was a member of this shul. The shul happened to be right next to a nice kosher café. Moshe went to the café owner and said, "Let's make a deal. I want to run a promotion: anyone who joins the minyan, even just to say Shema, put on tefillin, or participate for a little while, can get a free coffee and pastry." The café owner readily agreed. They put up a big sign near the outdoor minyan announcing the promotion: Shacharis, Minchah, Maariv, anyone who joins the minyan, even briefly, will receive a free coffee and pastry. It was in Eretz Yisroel, the weather was pleasant, and the idea turned into a great success. Many new people, some of them secular, straight off the street, came and joined, then enjoyed their fresh coffee and pastry. The minyanim were full of energy and joy, and the initiative worked beautifully. Eventually, though, the pandemic ended. Once restrictions were lifted, some members of the shul were eager to return to davening inside. But Moshe felt the outdoor setup had been so successful that they should continue. He argued, "If we move back inside, fewer people will join from the street. Let's keep the minyanim outside." Others disagreed. They felt it was better to daven inside a proper shul, a makom tefillah with fewer distractions. Moshe maintained that engaging more people was more important, and since there weren't enough participants for both an indoor and outdoor minyan, they had to choose one. So the question became: What's more important, davening inside a shul, in a makom tefillah, in a focused environment, or staying outside to reach and inspire more people, especially those who might not otherwise come to shul? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the minyan outside, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein answered that if non-religious people are still coming to join from off the street, it is best to keep the minyan outside for as long as possible, even after COVID no longer required it. That takes priority over moving the minyan back inside the shul.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Four Hebrew Edition p. 499

There was once a shul in a small settlement here in Israel whose ceiling collapsed. Thankfully, no one was hurt. However, the community needed a new place to daven. Someone who used to attend the shul mentioned that there was a nearby IDF army base that would be happy to host a minyan. So a small group began going to the army base daily to form a minyan. Many soldiers, including some high-ranking officers, joined them. The minyan became a great source of

inspiration, morale, and spiritual uplift for everyone on the base. Initially, on Shabbos, the minyan participants would enter the base through a small side door. But as time went on, the guard at the front gate began recognizing the group and would open the main electronic front gate to let them in. Eventually, this caused concern among the participants. While they were grateful for the minyan, they realized that by going through the main gate, the guard was operating an electronic door for them on Shabbos, which was a desecration of Shabbos. They tried to explain to the guard that it wasn't necessary to open the main gate, and they preferred to enter through the side. However, the guard insisted on opening the main gate, saying it was disrespectful for them to have to make the effort to walk to the side entrance. So now, the group faced a dilemma regarding whether they should continue coming to the base on Shabbos. On one hand, the minyan was bringing tremendous spiritual benefit to the base. On the other hand, their presence was inadvertently causing another Jew to violate Shabbos on their behalf. They asked Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein if they should discontinue the minyan at the army base or look for a new location. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the minyan on the army base, Rav Zilberstein answered that if the guard insisted on opening the gate on Shabbos, it would not be permissible to continue holding the minyan there on Shabbos.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Shabbos, p. 48

Moshe and Dovid were friends who met daily at the nearby shul for Shacharis. Over time, Dovid began waking up late, consistently arriving 10 to 15 minutes after Shacharis had started. One day, Moshe remarked, "It seems you've been arriving late daily. I guess you'll be late tomorrow too." Dovid countered, "No, I can wake up early. I'll be on time tomorrow." Skeptical, Moshe replied, "Given your track record, I doubt that." Dovid then proposed, "Let's make a bet. I'll wager 100 shekels that I'll arrive on time. If I do, you'll pay me 100 shekels; if not, I'll pay you." Moshe agreed, and they sealed the bet with a handshake. The following day, 10 minutes before 7:00 AM, an air raid siren sounded due to missiles launched by Israel's adversaries. Dovid arrived at the synagogue, visibly tired and partially dressed, but punctual. He claimed, "I won our bet. I'm here on time." Moshe retorted, "The only reason you awoke on time was the air raid siren." Dovid acknowledged, "True, that's why I woke up, because of the air raid siren, and I ran to the bomb shelter but ultimately, I am here on time." Moshe disagreed, "That doesn't count. You didn't wake up by yourself. Let's try another day." Dovid insisted, "I fulfilled the bet's conditions. Why should the reason for my punctuality matter?" They decided to seek Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky's opinion: Should Dovid receive the 100 shekels for winning the bet? On one hand, he arrived on time; But on the other, his punctuality wasn't due to an early awakening but because he hurried to the bomb shelter following the air raid siren. What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the bets and the air raid siren, Rav Zilberstein held that Dovid who woke up should not win the money because he did not wake up because of his own discipline. The only reason why he came was because of the air raid siren. However, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky held that Dovid should get the money because all Moshe, who made the bet, said was "if you come in time for davening, you will get the money." As long as Dovid came in time for davening, it's not relevant that Moshe meant to motivate him to have the discipline to wake up. However, everyone agrees that if Moshe said, "You'll get the money if you wake up in time," then in that case, Dovid would not get the money if he was woken by the air raid because it was clear that Moshe stressed that Dovid had to wake up by himself.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein / Table Talk Halachic Archive

There was a small yishuv in Eretz Yisrael that had only ten men. Every day, each person had to make sure to come on time because everyone was so absolutely needed to make the minyan. One day Eli forgot to set his alarm clock and slept in. The minyan waited for Eli for a while, but to their chagrin he did not show up. The minyan really valued the mitzvah of davening with a minyan and they did not want to daven without a tenth man. The gabai, Yoni, had an idea.

He called the taxi company and asked them to dispatch the nearest Jewish driver. The taxi driver came shortly. Yoni told the taxi driver: "We need you. We don't need you to drive us anywhere, but we need you to stay here for the next 45 minutes to help us with the minyan. You can leave the meter on, and we will pay you to stay with us to complete the minyan. The driver thought it was a splendid idea. He stayed and davened with them. When davening was over, the driver looked at the meter. It said that they owed him 200 shekels. The driver asked Yoni for the money. Yoni turned to the minyan and said, "Rabbosai, everyone please give me 22 shekels to pay the driver. Some people agreed. But one fellow argued: "I don't think I have to pay anything; you should pay for it yourself. You called the taxi without consulting us." Another fellow said, "The shul should pay for it and it should come from the shul's funds". The shul president, however, disagreed. Finally another voice said "You know who needs to pay this? - Eli, he did not show up to the minyan." In all, there were 4 opinions over who had to pay the taxi driver a) all of them, b) the gabbai, c) the shul, d) Eli, the one who slept in. They brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Who is obligated to pay?

Answer: Regarding the question of the taxi paid to complete a minyan, Rav Zilberstein says that Yoni, the one who slept in, is required to pay the taxi fee.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume Two, p. 366 (Table Talk Edition #89 (Parshas Eikev))

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rav Elazer ben Hurkenus once needed a tenth man for a minyan, so he freed his slave in order to make him eligible as part of a minyan.

Talmud Bavli, Berachos 47b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The lumber merchant had a problem. He had leased a forest from the local landowner and invested all of his money in a lumberyard. Business went very well and he looked forward to considerable profits during the twenty years which his contract entitled him to chop down the forest trees. But one day the landowner sold his estate to another landowner who started legal action to nullify this contract and take back the forest. The trial was set for Chol Hamoed Sukkos so that the lumber merchant did not have to forego his annual custom of spending the month at Elul and staying until after Yom Kippur near the Chofetz Chaim in Radin. One day between Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur the Chofetz Chaim started a conversation with the merchant about his business, When he heard about the problem and the forthcoming trial, the Chofetz Chaim cried. "For Heaven's sake you must go home immediately. You must be near the place of the trial so you can properly prepare for it." "But I want to be here with you until after Yom Kippur," argued the merchant. "Besides, my house is so far removed from a Jewish community that I won't even be able to daven with a Minyan on Yom Kippur." All of his arguments failed to sway the Chofetz Chaim who insisted that he immediately set out for home. He felt terrible at the thought of Yom Kippur near the forest but he obeyed the Chofetz Chaim's orders. When he arrived home it was pitch dark and a terrible storm made it impossible to walk the streets. No sooner had he settled himself into his house than he heard the sound of men banging on the window and asking him in Russian to open the door for them. He soon had four rain-soaked strangers in his home who explained that they had been caught by the rain during a stroll and were afraid to stay outside in such stormy weather. The merchant, displaying traditional Jewish hospitality, welcomed them and offered them food and drink as well as easy chairs to rest on, When they finally got over their chilling experience the merchant struck up a friendly conversation. He told them of his affair with the Landlord and his upcoming trial. "That is very interesting," said one of the Russian guests, "because I happen to be one of the Judges who are to rule on your case." Thanks to this judge the

merchant won his case and his business was saved. Only then did he realize why the Chofetz Chaim had been so determined in advising him to immediately go home'. Remember when It seems that things couldn't be worse, a blessing often comes disguised as a curse.

Who Wants Life?, By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

❖ During all the many years when Rav Yaakov Galinsky was associated with the yeshivah in Hadera and later traveling to raise funds to support Torah, he never missed davening vasikin with a minyan. When he moved in 1959 to Rav Kook Street in Bnei Brak, he davened during the week at Breslov on Maimon Street and, on Shabbos and festivals, at Bais Yosef on Chasam Sofer Street (now Beis Mattisyahu Yeshivah). In 1984, when he moved to Chiddushei Harim Street, he began davening in the Lederman Shul, where he davened for the next thirty years without missing a single tefillah. And for fifty years, he never missed davening with a minyan! Even when he was hospitalized, sick and weak, he made sure to daven with a minyan. One Shabbos, he was a patient at Beilinson hospital on the sixth floor. The synagogue was on the ground floor. What could he do? Walk down six flights of stairs? It was an impossibility. When his grandsons arrived he said to them, "Take me downstairs to daven in the shul with a minyan." The grandsons exchanged looks. What should they do? The wheelchair was heavy, so taking it down the stairs wasn't an option. How could they take their weak grandfather? "On your shoulders!" R' Yaakov said to them with spirit, spunk, and not the slightest trace of embarrassment. "Carry me on your shoulders like you'd carry a young child." And that's what they did.

From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, By Rebetzin G. Lehrer

❖ Cantor Louis Herman was a young Jew who lived in Canada during World War II. After hearing about the terrible things that were happening to the Jews in Europe, he decided to enlist in the army to fight against the Germans. When he finished his training, young Louis was transferred to Italy. As a sergeant in the army, he was assigned to the front, in the midst of heavy fighting. Throughout the difficult months of the war, Louis kept as many mitzvos as he possibly could. On the day of his mother's Yahrzeit, despite being many miles away from any shul, Louis wanted to say Kaddish for her. This prayer, however, would require a minyan, and finding ten Jews in the middle of a battlefield in Italy was not going to be easy. Louis knew of only five other Jewish soldiers in his unit. Louis approached the army chaplain, who was a priest, and explained his predicament. Louis asked the chaplain if he knew of any other Jewish soldiers in the area. To Louis's surprise, the chaplain not only knew where he could find other Jewish soldiers, but he also understood the meaning of a minyan. "See that area over there?" The chaplain pointed to a tall observation tower. "That is where our soldiers guard our unit and watch for advancing German soldiers. When they see any activity, they radio the information back to the artillery unit to help us aim our bombs more precisely. There are four Jews who occupy positions in the observation tower. If you'd like, I can put in a call to them and ask that they come over to our area for your minyan." Louis was overjoyed. He would have exactly the ten men required to make up a minyan. And to his great relief, the soldiers were happy to oblige. Louis was able to say Kaddish on his mother's Yahrzeit with a minyan. After they finished davening, Louis thanked everyone for joining him and enabling him to fulfill this meaningful personal obligation. As the four soldiers turned to walk back to the observation tower, they suddenly heard a loud explosion and saw a most startling sight. The entire tower and its contents had been blown up. Only the four Jewish soldiers, who had just "happened" to be busy doing a very important mitzvah, had escaped annihilation. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 8b) that "Shluchei mitzvah einan nizokin"—messengers who go to do a mitzvah are saved from harm. Not only do acts of chessed help others, but those very acts can also save us from harm.

For Goodness' Sake, By Rabbi Boruch Brull, Published by Feldheim Publishers

❖ The telephone in the home of Rav Yaakov Galinsky rang, and his wife answered. "Tell R' Yaakov that it's the fifth boy, and I'm engaged," the caller said. What in the world was he talking about? The rebbetzin could hardly wait for R' Yaakov to return from Shacharis, which he always davened with the vasikin minyan. When he heard the message, his face lit up. "What does it mean?" the Rebbetzin wanted to know. "When I was in the States," R' Yaakov told her, "it was Purim and we

drank a little to fulfill the mitzvah of the day. There were five older bachurim there, and they gave me more and more to drink. To make a long story short, when I sobered up a little, I saw a wad of $5000 next to me. I asked them what it was for, and they said to me, 'When you were drunk, you promised us that we would get engaged, all of us, within the year. We gave you $1000 each.' I was alarmed. 'I can't promise, maybe bless. Take back the money.' But they didn't want to. The youngest of them was twenty-eight, and they weren't giving in. I said to them, 'I'll daven, and I'll hold on to the money. If you get engaged, good. If not, you'll get the money back.' And today, the fifth boy called to tell me he's engaged."

From Rav Yaakov Galinsky, By Rebetzin G. Lehrer

❖ The story is told about a person who came to shul on time every morning to daven with a minyan. One day he didn't arrive. When asked what happened, he replied, "A hungry person needed food, so I had to feed him!" What hungry person goes out before Shacharis seeking food? The man explained that his baby was hungry, and his wife wasn't available to feed him. The baby was a "hungry person," and his father did the correct thing by staying home and caring for him.

I Am Your Servant, By Rabbi Akiva Tendler, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 348

B. TO TRAVEL UP TO 4 MIL FOR A MINYAN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-14

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person is obligated to exert significant effort and travel up to a distance of four mil along his route in order to pray with a minyan rather than pray in solitude. As Rashi, Tosafos, and the Rosh explain, if an individual is journeying and reaches the hour to lodge for the night, he must proceed up to four mil ahead if a synagogue with a quorum is situated there so that he may pray with the community and lodge nearby; conversely, if a lodging place with a minyan lies behind him, he is obligated to backtrack up to one mil, but is not required to retrace his steps beyond that distance.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Reb Dovid Feinstein was vigilant about davening in the yeshivah and usually tried arranging his travel schedule around the scheduled tefillos in the yeshivah. One day in March of 2020, he asked a close talmid to please drive him to a federal penitentiary four hours from New York. They left at dawn in order to make it for visiting hours, the Rosh Yeshivah davening in the car, b'yechidus, for him, the ultimate act of sacrifice. He did not know the prisoner, but he had heard his story. The inmate had been fighting with another person and accidentally took his life. Following the horrible crime, the family of this prisoner had cut off ties with him and he languished in prison without any visitors, or even mail or phone calls from the outside world. A person cannot exist without hope, and the thought of this prisoner and his hopeless existence allowed Reb Dovid no peace. He needed to go visit him, sit with him, and let him know that someone cared. The Rosh Yeshivah was ninety years old, carrying the burdens of many, but there was a lonely Jew who needed a friend. The very next day the first wave of Covid restrictions were implemented across America, and the prison was closed to visitors. Reb Dovid had made it just in time to speak words of encouragement and impart hope to the prisoner.

From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

C. TO BE ONE OF THE FIRST TEN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-2

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is an exceedingly praiseworthy mitzvah to arrive early and be counted among the first ten men (asarah rishonim) in the synagogue, for they constitute the foundational quorum that draws down the presence of the Shechinah and merit a spiritual reward equal to that of the entire gathered congregation.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ R' Mechel Rosenberg related: It was during the Klausenberger Rebbe's (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam's) first trip to Montreal. He was single-handedly trying to raise funds to buy a building and dormitory for the new yeshivah he had opened in Montreal when he had occasion to meet with a wealthy Jew, Mr. Nemirov, head of the Jewish Federation of Montreal. When the Rebbe asked for a donation for the yeshivah, Mr. Nemirov countered, "Why would you want to establish a yeshivah? We already have a Jewish school here in town, attended by hundreds of students." In reply, the Rebbe asked, "How many children are in the community school?" "Approximately three hundred," Mr. Nemirov responded. "How many of them do you estimate will remain religious Jews?" asked the Rebbe, black eyes flaming. Mr. Nemirov's answer: "About twenty percent." "That means," the Rebbe quickly calculated, "about sixty children. Now, let us think ahead. Those sixty students who remain religious will marry and establish families. Each family will have approximately two children. How many of those will remain shomrei Torah u'mitzvos? Again, twenty percent. So, according to your calculations, in about forty years from now, there will be approximately eighty-five religious Yidden who will be descendants of the original three hundred." "Now," the Rebbe continued, "let us try to do the math for what will come out of my yeshivah. Currently, my yeshivah has about thirty students. Each one of them will remain shomrei mitzvos. They will all marry and have families of approximately ten children each, and their families will also eventually marry and have families of approximately ten children. That means that in forty years from now, we will have some 3,000 Yidden who will keep Torah and mitzvos, compared to the eighty-five from your school. I ask you, where is it more worthwhile to invest your money?" Mr. Nemirov was so taken by the argument that he gave a handsome donation, which served as the seed money for the purchase of the yeshivah building.

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

D. TO DAVEN BY THE PROPER TIME

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-11

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a rabbinically mandated mitzvah to pray at the precisely designated halachic times of the day, just as the standardized text of the prayers was formulated by the Men of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesses HaGedolah). From a biblical standpoint, the fundamental obligation of prayer requires an individual to entreat Hashem once each day according to his personal ability, offering praise, articulating his personal needs, and expressing gratitude in his own words.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Chaim Kanievsky had already made a berachah and was busy searching for chametz when an avreich from Kollel Chazon Ish by the name of R' Yitzchak Sharfaz came to him for a berachah. His son was not feeling well and had been vomiting for a few days. While the doctor was optimistic that it was merely a passing virus, they scheduled an appointment for the next morning at the Schneider Children's Hospital in Petach Tikva to rule out anything more serious. As R' Yitzchak told R' Chaim the story, he could not hide his worry. R' Chaim held onto R' Yitzchak's hand and repeatedly said, "Refuah sheleimah!" R' Chaim didn't speak at length or say any more, as he was in the middle of doing bedikas chametz. By the time he concluded his bedikah after midnight, R' Chaim was exhausted. After saying the Kol Chamira, which declares all chametz ownerless, R' Chaim asked R' David Epstein if he knew where the avreich resided. "I know he lives on Rechov Chiddushei HaRim, but I'm not sure which is his house," his son-in-law replied. R' Chaim donned his hat and jacket and stated that he was going to the Sharfaz residence. "Even though I said refuah sheleimah several times, I'm wondering whether I should have spoken at greater length with him and offered more chizuk, even though I was doing bedikas chametz." Deena Epstein headed out with her father and husband to Rechov Chiddushei HaRim. They examined the names on the mailboxes at the entrance of each building until they found the Sharfaz residence. R' Chaim headed up the steps, accompanied by his daughter and son-in-law. He knocked on the door, which was immediately opened by R' Yitzchak Sharfaz, who held a Tehillim in his hands and whose eyes were red from weeping. R' Chaim apologized for not spending more time with him earlier. "I'm unsure if I did the correct thing by not stopping the bedikas chametz and speaking to you at greater length," he admitted. R' Chaim spent more than a half hour lifting the spirits of R' Yitzchak and his son, whom they had woken up. Finally, he said he must leave, as the time for davening k'vasikin was approaching and he had to make a Siyum Bechoros the next day. During Chol HaMoed, an elated R' Yitzchak Sharfaz and his smiling son came to R' Chaim with the joyous news that all medical tests had come back negative. The child's illness was indeed due to a passing virus.

From Rav Chaim, by R' Naftali Weinberger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Rabbi Moshe Cohen was the gabbai of the Lederman Shul, where Rav Chaim Kanievsky davened for close to sixty years. Some mornings in the early 1950s, there were not enough congregants for the Netz minyan. The assembled would daven without a minyan at sunrise, then wait for the 7 o'clock minyan to arrive so they could hear Kedushah, Borchu, Kaddish, Bircas Kohanim, and, on Mondays and Thursdays, the Torah reading. Largely in the merit of Rav Chaim's dedication to davening k'vasikin and stressing its importance, in later years the Netz minyan grew until it had more mispallelim than the 7 o'clock minyan. One Friday, Rav Chaim showed up at the Cohens' home. Rabbi Moshe wasn't there; a Cohen child told Rav Chaim that he was in Lederman's. "Please tell Rabbi Moshe that Chaim Kanievsky is looking for him," he requested. (In his humility, Rav Chaim assumed the Cohen children had no idea who he was.) Rav Chaim went to Lederman's Shul and met young Aharon Cohen (who would later follow in his father's footsteps as gabbai). "Do you know where your father is?" asked Rav Chaim. Aharon pointed to a long ladder. "My father went up to the roof to fix the dud shemesh (solar-powered water heater commonly used in Israel)." Rav Chaim took a sefer and waited at the base of the ladder for fifteen minutes. He then told Aharon, "People saw that Moshe delayed to come down from the mountain" (Shemos 32:1) -- and proceeded to climb up the long ladder and step onto the roof. Rabbi Moshe could not believe his eyes. Rav Chaim was probably the last person he expected to see there! "What does the Rav need?" he asked softly. Rav Chaim replied that he wanted to redt a shidduch for Rabbi Moshe's daughter. He had gone to Rabbi Moshe's house, followed him to shul, and waited for him to come down from the roof. Now he wanted to get back home to begin his learning seder, yet felt it was not proper to start his session until he had redt the shidduch. Rabbi Moshe promised to look into the suggestion and told Rav Chaim he would get back to him the next day. Rav Chaim's diligence paid off, and a shidduch resulted from his excursion to the Lederman Shul's roof. The Cohen daughter got engaged to Rabbi Betzalel Honigsberg, brother of Rav Chaim's grandson Rabbi Gedaliah Honigsberg.

From Rav Chaim, By R' Naftali Weinberger, Published by Artscroll

E. TO HAVE A SET PLACE TO DAVEN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-3

As it says " He went to the place where he stood in the past" (Bereishis 19:27, Parshas Vayeira)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred mitzvah to establish a fixed synagogue in which to pray regularly, as Scripture recounts of the patriarch Avraham: 'And Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem' (Bereishis 19:27) — where 'standing' denotes prayer (Berachos 6b). Many halachic authorities rule that this principle extends further, requiring a person to designate a fixed seat (makom kavua) within the synagogue itself.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A congregant purchased a permanent seat along the wall of a synagogue. Years later, the synagogue undertook a major expansion project, knocking down the existing perimeter wall and adding four additional rows of seats beyond where the wall had stood. The congregant asserted that his original purchase was specifically for a seat adjacent to the wall (etzel ha-kotel), entitling him to a seat beside the new wall. The synagogue administration countered that his purchase pertained exclusively to his exact spatial location, which now sits four seats away from the wall. Does the congregant retain the right to sit next to the new wall, or does he remain in his previous physical spot?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein analyzes the rights of seat ownership under the classic laws of communal seat tenure (Chazakas Makom in Choshen Mishpat 162:7 and Orach Chaim 90:19). A congregant who purchased a permanent seat along the wall of a synagogue retains an enforceable proprietary interest in a premier position of dignity, and when the sanctuary expands, the leadership cannot arbitrarily relegate him or degrade his status. The administration must accommodate him fairly and work cooperatively with him to assign a comparable position preserving communal harmony (Darchei Shalom). (Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed Berachos 7b / Veharev Na)

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed Berachos 7b

F. TO WASH HANDS BEFORE TEFILLAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-5

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Does one have to wash if he knows that his hands are clean?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

According to the Rambam, there is an explicit rabbinic commandment to wash one's hands prior to prayer. Even if a person knows his hands to be physically clean and has not used the lavatory, he is obligated to wash both hands with a quarter-log (revi'is) of water from a vessel before Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv, performing this washing in the exact ritual manner required before partaking of bread.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:6)

Hashem instituted morning practices to elevate and purify (metaher) that which was diminished and spiritually defiled during sleep. By elevating himself, man elevates the entire creation (briah), drawing down a divine outflow upon the spiritual forces. This spiritual remedy (tikun) is embodied in the enactments of Chazal for the morning: physical actions such as netilas yadayim, tzitzis, and tefillin, alongside sacred words of tefillah.

The first action (pe'ulah) to elevate man is netilas yadayim. The hands contract an impure spirit (ruach ra'ah) during sleep, and Hashem established that washing expels the tumah from his hands, thereby removing it from his entire body. When one purifies his body, this exerts a spiritual influence upon the entire world, purifying it from the spiritual darkness that rested upon it during the night.

G. TO TRAVEL UP TO 4 MIL FOR WATER TO WASH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-16

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ What should one do if no water is available?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The Rif and the Rambam explain that the Talmudic dictum requiring one to travel up to four mil applies equally to securing water for washing before prayer: if a traveler lacks water, he must exert himself to journey up to four mil ahead along his route, or one mil behind him, to obtain it. If water is unavailable within four mil ahead or one mil behind, he must cleanse his hands thoroughly with an abrasive surface such as stone, earth, or a cloth (kinu'ach), and then proceed to pray.

H. TO DAVEN WITH SERIOUSNESS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must not stand to pray except in a state of solemn reverence and gravity (koved rosh; Berachos 30b). Rashi explains that this posture embodies profound humility and the complete rejection of levity (kalus rosh), fulfilling the scriptural injunction: 'Serve Hashem with awe, and rejoice with trembling' (Tehillim 2:11) — meaning that where holy joy is experienced, it must be sanctified by trembling reverence. This same vigilance applies during sacred celebrations such as a wedding or a bris milah, ensuring that exuberant joy does not degenerate into heedless frivolity or lead to sin through the forgetfulness of Hashem.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ During the Yom Kippur service, the High Priest would offer a brief prayer in the Sanctuary upon emerging from the Holy of Holies, and would not prolong his prayer lest the congregation standing outside become terrified that some mishap had befallen him inside. It once happened that a High Priest lingered in prayer longer than usual, and his anxious fellow

Kohanim resolved to enter after him to see if he was safe. Just as they were about to step inside, he emerged in peace—and they said that this High Priest was Shimon HaTzaddik (Simon the Just). His fellow Kohanim asked him: 'Why did you prolong your prayer today more than in other years?' Shimon HaTzaddik answered them: 'I was pouring out my heart in prayer for the Sanctuary of your God, that it should not be destroyed!' They said to him: 'Even so, you should not have prolonged your prayer when all Israel was waiting in fear for your safe return!'

Talmud Yerushalmi Yoma 5:2:6

I. TO DAVEN WITH JOY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must not enter into prayer while weighed down by the gloom or grief of mundane concerns; rather, he should approach prayer through the sanctified joy of performing a divine commandment (simchah shel mitzvah). He should rejoice and exult in the sublime privilege of standing in service before the supreme King of kings, whose majesty is beyond compare in all of Creation.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rav Moshe Wolfson, would often teach that one can get tremendous pleasure from Tefillah. He illustrated this with the following story. A chassid once came to R' Aharon Karliner, the Beis Aharon and told him that the local poritz (gentile landowner) had been gripped by a desire to go sledding. The problem was that this happened in July, when there was no snow on the ground. No matter. The poritz's servants knew that "what the poritz wants, the poritz gets," or else they would suffer the consequences. But the only substitute for snow that they could find was sugar, which was so prohibitively expensive at the time that most people could not afford to put a spoonful in their tea. The poritz's men purchased hundreds of sacks of sugar and spread the precious grains out across a large area. They then hitched a sled to two white stallions, and the poritz went sledding on that sugar. "Isn't it something?" the chassid asked the Beis Aharon. "The poritz can get whatever earthly pleasure he desires." But the Beis Aharon was not impressed. "You call that pleasure? I assure you that whatever pleasure the poritz had from his sledding does not in any way compare to the pleasure I derive from saying Nishmas on Shabbos morning!"

From Service of the Heart

J. TO LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW TOWARDS THE SKY BEFORE BEGINNING TEFILLAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 36-3

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- What is the purpose of this?
- Should one do this in the middle of prayer?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should pray exclusively in a room or synagogue furnished with windows directed toward heaven (Berachos 34b). As Rashi explains, gazing out toward the heavens before beginning prayer humbles a person's heart and focuses his mind on divine greatness, echoing the verse: 'When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers... what is mortal man that You are mindful of him?' (Tehillim 8:4–5). One should look toward the sky specifically prior to commencing the Amidah, for once he begins praying, his eyes must remain cast downward or closed in reverent concentration.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Abba Chilkiyah was the grandson of Choni HaMe'aggel, and whenever the world needed rain, the Sages would send emissaries to him to pray for mercy. Once two scholars came and found him hoeing in the field as a hired day-laborer; they greeted him, and he did not even turn his head to answer, so as not to waste a single moment of his employer's time! On the walk home, he carried his wood bundle on his bare shoulder to spare his borrowed cloak, wore his shoes only when wading through water where he could not see scorpions, and lifted his garments over thorns because scratches on skin heal whereas torn clothes do not. When he reached home, his wife came out adorned to greet him so he would never look at another woman; she entered first, he entered after her, and the scholars entered last. Before the scholars could even state their request, Abba Chilkiyah whispered to his wife: 'I know the rabbis have come for rain; let us go up to the roof and pray ourselves, so the Holy One may send rain without anyone giving us the credit!' They climbed to the roof; he stood in one corner and she stood in the opposite corner, and the rain cloud rose first from his wife's corner! When the scholars asked him why the cloud rose from her corner first, he answered: 'Because she stays in the house and gives ready-to-eat bread directly to the poor, whereas I give them coins that they must still take to the market to buy grain—and because when wicked bandits once lived in our neighborhood, I prayed that they should die, whereas she prayed that they should repent, and they repented!'

Taanis 23a–23b

K. TO FEEL THAT YOU ARE STANDING IN FRONT OF THE KODESH HAKADOSHIM, AND IN FRONT OF HASHEM HIMSELF

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 36-1

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught that when a person stands in prayer for the Shemoneh Esreh, his physical eyes should be cast downward toward the ground while his heart is directed upward toward heaven (Yevamos 105b). In this posture, he should cultivate the vivid awareness that he is standing directly before the Holy of Holies (Kodesh HaKodashim) and in the immediate presence of the Almighty Himself.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Where was the holy Ark of the Testimony (Aron HaEdus) hidden during the Second Temple era after King Yoshiyahu concealed it prior to the Babylonian destruction? It once happened that a Kohen was busy inspecting the Altar firewood in the Chamber of the Wood (Digs of the Blemished Kohanim), and he noticed that one marble paving stone in the floor

looked slightly different and looser than all the surrounding stones! He walked over to his fellow Kohen and began to say: 'Look at this stone —' Before he could even finish his sentence, his soul departed from him on the spot, and all the Sages knew with certainty that right beneath that stone the holy Ark of the Covenant lay hidden!

Mishnah, Shekalim 6:2

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Alter of Slabodka taught by example as much as by word. Once, during the Russian civil war, in the 1920's they were davening in a room in the midst of an artillery bombardment by the White Army. While they were reciting Shemoneh Esrei, a large chandelier came crashing down from the ceiling. After finishing his prayers, the Alter saw the chandelier on the floor and turned to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky to ask how it had come to be there.

5 Great Lives, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

L. TO STAND FOR THE AMIDAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 18-14, 42-4 Divrei Kivushin of Sefer Chareidim 34

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Regarding the foundational mitzvah of prayer derived from the Torah, our Sages established that it must be recited while standing upright on one's feet, as Scripture states: 'Then Pinchas stood up and prayed (vaya'amod Pinchas vayefalel), and the plague was halted' (Tehillim 106:30), demonstrating that standing is the essential posture of prayer before Hashem.

M. TO CLOSE EYES, OR NOT LOOK OUT OF SIDDUR

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 36-2 Divrei Kivushin of Sefer Chareidim 29

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person must be scrupulously vigilant to keep his eyes closed during the Amidah, or gaze intently downward into his prayer book (siddur), out of awe for the Divine Presence (Shechinah). The holy Zohar (Vayechi 225a) teaches that one who stands in prayer must align his feet, cover his head like a servant standing before a king, and keep his eyes covered or cast downward to avoid gazing at the Shechinah. The Zohar warns that one who stares carelessly around during prayer or fails to direct his eyes downward causes his days to be shortened, and when his soul departs this world, he will be denied the clarity of beholding the Divine Splendor and will not merit departing through the divine kiss (misas neshikah).

N. TO PUT LEGS TOGETHER

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-5

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a sacred mitzvah to place one's feet together side by side during the Amidah, standing as though they were a single unified leg in emulation of the ministering angels, as Scripture portrays the heavenly hosts: 'And their feet were a straight foot' (Yechezkel 1:7; Berachos 10b).

O. TO BOW FIVE TIMES IN SHEMONEH ESREI

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-6

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a prescribed mitzvah to bow during the Amidah by bending the knees slightly and then bending the upper body forward like a bow until the vertebrae in the spine protrude (Berachos 12b, 34a). An individual performs this reverent bowing at four specific junctures during the Shemoneh Esreh: at the beginning and conclusion of the first blessing (Avos), and at the beginning and conclusion of the thanksgiving blessing (Modim). In addition, one bows upon concluding prayer during Oseh Shalom, and the congregation joins in bowing during the reader's repetition when reciting Modim D'Rabbanan.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rabbi Shmuel bar Natan recounted in the name of Rabbi Chama bar Chanina: An incident occurred involving a prayer leader who bowed excessively at every blessing of the Amidah to make a public display of piety, and Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi removed him (or, as Rabbi Chiya bar Ba explained, sharply rebuked him)—teaching that one bows at the beginning and end of the first and thanksgiving blessings as ordained by the Sages, without ostentatious display!

Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachos 1:5 (9b)

P. TO HEAR YOUR WORDS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 11-7, Sefer Chareidim 37-3

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If one did not hear their words, would they have to say it again?
- Is this true even for the amida?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The fundamental commandments of prayer (Tefillah), the Grace After Meals (Birkas HaMazon), and the Blessings over Torah study (Birkas HaTorah) — all of which possess biblical authority (d'Oraisa) — are inherently linked to verbal enunciation that reaches the ear. As the Rambam writes (Hilchos Berachos 1:7), with regard to all blessings, it is a mitzvah for an individual to hear every single word that emerges from his lips. Many halachic authorities rule that if one merely meditated on the words in his heart without audibly whispering them so his own ears could hear, he has not fulfilled his obligation and must repeat the blessing. Even

concerning the Shemoneh Esreh, which was ordained to be recited in an undertone, the halachic requirement of quietude means only that one's neighbor should not overhear his prayer; however, the worshiper himself must articulate the words clearly enough to hear his own voice.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Listening to Reb Elyah Lopian davening was truly a lesson in tefillah with kavanah. He would pronounce each word aloud, though not so loud as to disturb anyone else who was davening. Hearing the words of his tefillos, one could feel the holiness and grasp the depths of their meanings. He felt Hashem's presence so clearly before him that his prayers often took the form of intimate conversation with his Creator. After having davened Minchah in the yeshivah, a visitor to the yeshivah was asked to describe his impressions of the experience. He replied, "The decorum that characterized the davening, and the strict devotion of all the talmidim as they were swaying, was unbelievable. Everyone there was davening with tremendous kavanah, except for one old man in the front of the beis hamedrash, who spent the whole time talking!"

Reb Elya, By David J. Schlossberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

Q. TO SAY THE AMIDAH IN A LOW VOICE SO THAT NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 47-15

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is strictly forbidden for an individual praying the Shemoneh Esreh to raise his voice to a volume that allows his companion to hear his words, for Hannah taught the enduring standard of prayer: 'Only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard' (Shmuel I 1:13; Berachos 24b, 31b). The holy Zohar warns that if a person deliberately raises his voice during the silent prayer, his prayer is not accepted before Hashem, blessed be He, for such conduct disrupts the prayers of others and betrays a flawed perception of divine omniscience.

R. TO PRONOUNCE EVERY SINGLE WORD AS IF YOU WERE COUNTING MONEY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-50, 38-20,

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Although the mitzvah of prayer is fundamentally defined as the 'service of the heart' (avodah shebalev), its halachic fulfillment is inextricably bound to verbal enunciation: a person must articulate every single word from his lips with meticulous precision, in a soft whisper audible to his own ears. The Semak (Sefer Mitzvos Katan, §11) writes that an individual should enunciate each sacred word of prayer with the same painstaking deliberation and vigilance as someone counting precious gold coins. If one merely contemplated the prayers in his mind without enunciating the words with his lips, the overwhelming consensus of halachic authorities (poskim) rules that he has failed to fulfill his obligation.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ When Haman sent out his first decree, the verse states: "A copy of the document to be given as law in every province... to be ready for that day" (Esther 3:14). Rabbi Levi said: The predictions of the wicked nations of the world are always ambiguous and double-edged, so that they themselves do not know whether their words mean that they will kill or be killed. To what may this be compared? To a weary traveler who was trudging along a long road, and from the hardship of the journey his ankle became swollen and sore. Limping in pain, he sighed and prayed: "Oh, if only I had a donkey!" Just at that moment, a Roman officer rode by whose she-donkey had just given birth on the road to a newborn foal that was too young to walk on its own legs. Exercising his Roman authority to conscript passersby into carrying loads, the Roman officer pointed at the limping traveler and barked: "Hey you! Pick up this newborn donkey foal and carry it on your shoulders!" As the weary traveler trudged down the road with the newborn donkey riding on his back, he said to himself with a rueful smile: "Indeed, my prayer for a donkey was answered immediately — except that I forgot to specify properly whether the donkey would be for me to ride upon, or for the donkey to ride upon me!" So too, the wording of the wicked Haman's decree was ambiguous — simply "to be ready for that day," without specifying who would triumph — and it boomeranged onto his own head; whereas Mordechai and Esther's decree was stated with crystal clarity: "that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies" (Esther 8:13).

Midrash Rabbah — Esther Rabbah 7:24 (cf. Yalkut Shimoni 1056:1)

S. TO TAKE THREE STEPS BACK AFTER THE AMIDAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-8

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Upon concluding the Amidah at Oseh Shalom, a person must take three measured steps backward with bowed posture, departing with the profound reverence of a royal subject respectfully taking leave from the presence of a king (Yoma 53b).

T. TO ALIGN ONE'S LEGS DURING KEDUSHAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 42-7

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Many halachic authorities rule that when the chazzan recites Kedushah and the congregation responds in unison with him — proclaiming "Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh" — a person must align his feet straight together side by side, so that they appear as a single foot.

U. SOMEONE WHO HAS A GOOD VOICE SHOULD BE CHAZAN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-18

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states: "Honor Hashem with your wealth" (Mishlei 3:9). Our Sages expounded homiletically: do not read meihonecha ("from your wealth"), but migronecha ("from your throat" / with your voice). Accordingly, if a person is blessed with a pleasant, sweet voice, he should sing praise before Him, blessed is He, and lead the congregation in prayer as chazzan.

V. NOT TO WALK IN FRONT OF SOMEONE WHO IS SAYING THE AMIDAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 50-9

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to sit beside or stand directly in front of someone who is reciting the Shemoneh Esrei, unless one maintains a distance of at least four amos (cubits).

W. NOT TO TAKE LARGE STEPS LEAVING THE SHUL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 50-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is forbidden to take large, hurried strides when departing from the synagogue.

BRACHOS: CONSCIOUSNESS OF DIVINE BENEFICENCE

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to the mitzvah of making brachos. Thus mitzvah helps us to develop a sense of gratitude for all that Hashem has blessed us with and serves to inspire us to come close to Hashem by perfecting our character.

11. To Recite Birkas HaMazon and Other Blessings

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 13

As the Torah says, And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless Hashem your God (Devarim 8:10, Parshas Eikev)

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- How much do you have to eat to say Bircat hamazon?
- Is this mitzvah limited to making a blessing after we eat?
- Are women obligated to say bircat hamazon?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

By biblical law (mid'Oraisa), one is not obligated to recite the Grace After Meals (Birkas HaMazon) unless he has eaten to full satiety; but by rabbinic enactment (mid'Rabbanan), even if one eats merely an olive's volume (k'zayis) of bread, he is obligated to recite Birkas HaMazon afterward.

Prior to eating, one is likewise obligated to recite a blessing (berachah rishonah), derived through an a fortiori deduction (kal vachomer): If a person is obligated to bless Hashem when he is sated and satisfied, how much more so must he bless Him when he is hungry and about to partake of His food!

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for men. For women, it is a matter of halachic doubt whether their obligation stems from biblical law (d'Oraisa) or rabbinic law (d'Rabbanan).

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

Brachos are to remind us to appreciate that Hashem is the source of our food. This helps us develop gratitude and love for Hashem, which inspires us to come close to Him. In addition, the berachah is a resolution for us to use the energy gained from the food to truly bless Hashem. How do we bless Hashem? We bless Hashem by fulfilling His mitzvos and perfecting our character. This advances Hashem's goals and helps to spread greater respect for Him.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:44)

The purpose of Birkas HaMazon is to develop love for Hashem, reverence of Hashem, trust in Hashem, a commitment to keep the mitzvos, and to develop proper perspective and character.

SEFER HACHINUCH (MITZVAH 430)

Hashem wants us to realize and appreciate that all of our blessings come from Him. When we realize that, Hashem can then give us more of His blessings.

RABBEINU BACHYA (DEVARIM 8)

Birkas HaMazon is to testify about Hashem's providence over the world. We testify that the world doesn't run by itself and all that we have comes from Him.

ABARBANEL (DEVARIM 8)

We say Birkas HaMazon so that we don't succumb to the illusion of "kochi v'otzem yadi" ("my strength and the might of my hand produced this wealth"), believing that our food and livelihood come solely from our own efforts, and consequently forgetting the Torah. We want to remember that our livelihood comes from Hashem and must be utilized to serve Him.

SFAS EMES

• In Mishpatim, on the words "And He will bless your bread and your water," the Sfas Emes gives a linguistic explanation of the word blessing (berachah). He relates it to bending a vine into the soil (havrachah) and grafting (harkavah). In agriculture, the blessing (ha-berachah) means bending a branch into the earth so that it becomes rooted and produces new growth. Grafting (harkavah) means joining one living growth into another. The Sfas Emes uses this image to explain berachah. The physical deed appears like a branch extending outward into this physical world (Olam HaZeh). The linguistic chiddush expresses the spiritual mechanism. To bless over our food and deeds is to graft the physical branch back into its living Divine root (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Mishpatim 5631).

• The Torah declares: “Not by bread alone does man live, but by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live” (Devarim 8:3). A person appears to live from bread. The Sfas Emes, citing the Arizal, explains that the visible bread nourishes the body, while hidden within it is a deeper nourishment. Every created thing exists because the Divine utterance (ma'amar) of Hashem gives it life. That utterance of Hashem's mouth (motza pi Hashem) is the inner spiritual essence (penimiyus) of the food. He writes: Through berachos one merits to find the inner nourishment that feeds the soul. This gives new meaning to the familiar teaching of Pirkei Avos, “If there is no flour, there is no Torah”: physical nourishment enables Torah, but within that physical nourishment itself lies a word of Hashem (dvar Hashem) that can strengthen the inner life of the person (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5649).

• The Torah places two contrasting verses side by side in Parshas Eikev: first it commands, “And you shall eat, be satisfied, and bless Hashem your God” (Devarim 8:10), and immediately afterward it warns, “Lest you eat and be satisfied… and your heart grow haughty and you forget Hashem your God” (Devarim 8:12–14). The same physical

satiety (sevi'ah) can lead either to blessing or to forgetfulness. Citing Chazal's teaching that a person rebels only out of fullness, the Sfas Emes explains that hunger naturally reminds a person of his dependence, whereas fullness creates the illusion of self-sufficiency. Birkas HaMazon is the spiritual rectification (tikkun) of satiety: at the very moment when the body is full and tempted toward haughtiness, blessing Hashem keeps the heart humble and connected to the Giver (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5649).

• Chazal teach that Moshe Rabbeinu established the blessing for nourishment (Birkas HaZan) when the manna (mann) descended, while Yehoshua established the blessing of the Land (birkas ha-aretz) when Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael. The Sfas Emes sees these as two stages of one system of nourishment. The manna (mann) was bread from Heaven (lechem min ha-shamayim). Its Divine source was obvious. There was almost no room for a person to imagine that his own agricultural spiritual power (koach) had produced it. Eretz Yisrael introduced bread from the earth (lechem min ha-aretz). The same Divine shefa now entered nature and human labor. The greater miracle (nes) is therefore not always the suspension of nature. There is also a revelation of Hashem when ordinary bread, grown through soil and rain and human labor, is recognized as the continuation of bread from Heaven (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5658).

• Chazal require the mention of covenant (bris) and Torah in Birkas HaMazon. He explains: Bris and Torah give Israel the ability to uncover the holiness (kedushah) within material nourishment. Bris teaches that the human body itself can bear a Divine covenant. Torah gives the spiritual awareness (da'as) through which the inner purpose of the physical world can be recognized. Together they make it possible for eating to remain within kedushah. The mention of covenant and Torah (bris ve-Torah) is therefore part of the inner meaning of the meal. A human being can consume the same physical food as an animal. Birkas HaMazon reminds the Jew that his nourishment is meant to enter a life shaped by covenant (bris) and Torah (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5649).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A meshulach, (a fundraiser) named Moshe, who was collecting for several poor families in Israel, once stayed at someone's home in the US for a Shabbos meal. Towards the end of the meal the host asked Moshe to tell him some more private details including the names of the families that he is collecting for. Moshe very politely said that this information was private and he that he couldn't reveal the information. The host then pressed him, but Moshe refused to disclose the private details. Finally the host got mad, and said "you have no gratitude please leave right away. Get out now". Moshe sadly left the meal and sat on a bench outside. Moshe had to say Bircas Hamazon (Grace after Meals). There is a halachah (Torah Law) that a guest is supposed to bless and pray for his host during Birkas Hamazon out of gratitude for the meal. Moshe wondered if he is obligated to say the blessing for his host even in this case. Should he say the prayer for the host who threw him out? Firstly the host was extremely rude to him. Secondly, at the time of the birkas hamazon, he was no longer with the host. According to Jewish law, what do you think Moshe is obligated to do?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein cites one of the Gedolei HaDor who ruled that Moshe should still recite the guest's blessing for his host (Birchas HaOreach) during Birchas HaMazon. Even though the host lost his temper and treated him with terrible disrespect, the halachic obligation of Birchas HaOreach is fundamentally grounded in hakaras hatov (gratitude) for the food that sustained him. Because Moshe ate the host's food, derived physical nourishment from it, and is now required to bench on that very meal, the gratitude for the food remains fully intact. Therefore, he should overcome his personal hurt and bless his host as prescribed by the Sages.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 381

In the Kovno Ghetto, many Jews would gather daily to pray in a room that was designated as synagogue. The morning prayers are traditionally opened with a series of morning blessings thanking G-d for various gifts. The second blessing is the blessing that reads "Blessed be you G-d, for not making me a slave." One morning the chazzan Avraham Josef, who normally began the prayers called out the following as he was about to say the second blessing: "How can we say this blessing when we are jailed and in captivity? We have been sold for no price. How can a slave make the blessing of freedom, when the collar of slavery is around his neck, and chains bind his body? How can we thank G-d for not making us slaves? This is a mockery. It is like a mad and insane person who does not know what is happening to him. We have a great principle, that one needs to have intent when he says his prayers, and one's heart should match his lips. How can I say this blessing if my heart is not with me?" Chazzan Avraham would say this "blessing" every morning instead of saying the normal blessing of "Lo asani eved". Eventually many in the synagogue became unsure if this was an appropriate practice, and asked R' Oshry for his opinion. Can one recite this blessing when one is an enslaved forced laborer? Should one continue saying it to maintain hope and express that, despite physical bondage, a Jew remains intrinsically free as a servant of Hashem? Or is it inappropriate to recite when chained in captivity?

Answer: Rav Ephraim Oshry ruled that it was strictly forbidden to omit or alter the morning blessing of 'Shelo asani eved' ('Who has not made me a slave') in the ghetto, and that on the contrary, reciting it was a sacred obligation of spiritual defiance. Citing the Abudraham (Hilchos Berachos, 'HaShavui'), he explained that our Sages did not institute this blessing over physical freedom from forced labor, but rather over spiritual freedom: a Canaanite slave (eved kena'ani) is exempt from full mitzvah obligations and cannot enter the congregation of Israel, whereas a Jewish captive remains a full bar-mitzvos whose soul is bound to Hashem's Torah even when enemy coercion temporarily prevents him from performing certain commandments. By proclaiming 'Shelo asani eved' behind barbed wire, the Jews of Kovno declared before Hashem and their tormentors that their souls remained free children of the King.

— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 3, Siman 6

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once, as part of treatment for an ailment, Rav Nechemia Alter's (the Lev Simchah's father-in-law's) doctor ordered him not to eat bread for several weeks. “Going without bread is fine,” he replied. “But how do you expect me to forgo the precious mitzvah of reciting the benching?”

From The Summit: Rav Simchah Bunim Alter (The Lev Simchah), by Simcha Leib Grossbard, published by Yeshurun Publications

A. TO WASH MAYIM ACHRONIM

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 41-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Washing the fingers with final waters (mayim acharonim) prior to reciting Birkas HaMazon is a binding obligation and an act of sacred discipline. Whoever is lax or lenient regarding this practice will have his days and years treated lightly (curtailed) from Heaven, as was answered in a dream-inquiry (she'elas chalom) received by the son-in-law of the Mordechai. In the holy Zohar, this requirement is likewise treated with supreme stringency.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Rav Idi bar Avin said in the name of Rav Yitzchak bar Ashyan: 'Washing the hands before the meal (Mayim Rishonim) is a mitzvah, and washing the fingers after the meal (Mayim Acharonim) is an obligation.' Rav Yehudah the son of Rabbi Chiya asked: 'Why did the Sages declare Mayim Acharonim an obligation? Because there is Sodomite salt in table salt that can blind the eyes if a person touches his eyes before rinsing his fingers!' When Rav Dimi came from the Land of Israel, he stated a cryptic maxim: 'Neglecting First Waters (Mayim Rishonim) caused a man to eat swine's flesh, and neglecting Last Waters (Mayim Acharonim) caused a woman to be divorced from her husband!' When Ravin came, he added: 'Neglecting First Waters caused a man to eat non-kosher carrion, and neglecting Last Waters cost a life!' (As Rashi explains the famous story: A Jewish innkeeper used to serve kosher meat to Jews who washed Mayim Rishonim, and pork to gentiles who did not wash; a Jew who sat down and ate without washing Mayim Rishonim was mistaken for a gentile and served pork! And another man who did not wash Mayim Acharonim left residue of lentil stew on his fingers; a thief saw the dried residue on his hands, went to the man's wife claiming her husband had sent him for his precious signet ring, and gave 'you cooked lentils today!' as a secret sign—whereupon she handed over the ring!)

Talmud Bavli, Chullin 105a–106a

B. TO MAKE A ZIMMUN

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38–16

As it says, "When I call the name of Hashem, bring greatness to our G-d. (Devarim 32:3, Parshas Haazinu)"

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states: "When I call upon the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our God" (Devarim 32:3). Although the primary halachic intent of this verse teaches the obligation to recite a blessing before Torah study, as the Ramban writes, our Sages derived from it as an asmachta (scriptural allusion) that three who dine together are obligated to recite the communal invitation blessing (zimun) before Birkas HaMazon.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• The mishna's mirror image is harsher than any zimun law: three who ate on one table and did NOT speak words of Torah are as though they ate from sacrifices offered to the dead. The Sfas Emes answers: eating belongs to the realm of change — matter descending, transforming, decaying — and change is death's own element. A meal that stays on that level is eaten BY the table rather than FROM it; the eaters are consumed by their own descent. But through Torah, the tree of life, the table rises to its root, a table without change, which is to say without death. If their table was from sacrifices of the dead (mi-zivchei meisim), the joint blessing would be a lie; the zimun can only be said over a table that has become the table of the Omnipresent (shulchano shel Makom). That is why the obligation binds only eaters who ate together as one — the table either became one table before Him, or it ate them (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Emor 5656).

• In Parshas Eikev (5649), the Sfas Emes explores the spiritual transition from individual gratitude in Birkas HaMazon to the communal call of Zimun, which the Gemara (Berachos 45a) derives from the verse "Declare the greatness of Hashem with me, and let us exalt His Name together" (Tehillim 34:4). When a lone individual recites a blessing after his meal, he connects his nourishment to Heaven according to the measure of his private spiritual rung. When three or ten Jews sit together in fellowship and formally invite one another to bless Hashem through Zimun (u'neromemah Shemo yachdav), their mutual awakening creates a unified vessel that draws down a far loftier revelation of Hashem's Name than any individual could reach alone (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Eikev 5649).

• Three people who ate together as one unit may not bentch each on his own — they are bound to join in a zimun, and ten add His Name to the formula. The obligation is strange: eating is the most private and bodily of acts, and the bentching that follows is owed by each stomach that was fed. Why should the mere fact of having eaten together — even strangers seated at one table — forge a single halachic body for the blessing? The gemara's own language deepens the puzzle: the mezamen calls out let us bless — as though the three are one mouth; with ten it becomes "Let us bless our God," and the Divine Name itself enters the formula. The formula "Ascribe greatness to our God" (Havu godel) and "Let us bless" (nevareich) is the declaration that the table was His all along; with ten the Name enters because the gathering has made the table fully His, and the blessing must name Him. One table, one root, one blessing — the zimun is the table confessing its own name (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Re'eh 5661).

C. TO SAY BRACHOS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-12,13,14,15

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- If one takes a very small sip of water, do they have to make a berachah?
- Would they make an after berachah for that small amount?
- How much does one have to eat in order to be obligated in an after-bracha?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

There is a rabbinic mitzvah to recite blessings over physical enjoyment and benefit (birchos ha-nehenin). One recites a blessing prior to partaking of food or drink in any amount, and an after-blessing (berachah acharonah) if one consumed at least an olive's volume (k'zayis) of food or a revi'is (halachic liquid measure) of drink.

There is a rabbinic mitzvah to recite blessings of praise and thanksgiving (birchos hoda'ah) over past deliverances and natural wonders.

There is a rabbinic mitzvah to recite blessings of petition (birchos bakashah) supplicating Hashem for future benevolence, well-being, and protection.

There is a rabbinic mitzvah to recite blessings prior to the performance of specific mitzvos (birchos ha-mitzvos).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

SFAS EMES

• Yitzchak found a hundred gates. The Sfas Emes teaches, in his grandfather's name, that these hundred gates open every day by the power of the hundred blessings — and so too the Rikanati. A natural question arises: what does the count of blessings have to do with gates, and why is the key to a hundred gates of hidden good placed specifically in the mouth of a man who blesses a hundred times a day? This is why it was Yitzchak, the pillar of yirah, who found them: yirah is the vessel-making, the hollowing of the self, and the blessing is yirah in action — the acknowledgment, a hundred times a day, that the good is hidden and must be received as a gift (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Toldos 5657).

• In his 5631 discourse on Parshas Mishpatim, the Sfas Emes examines the verse "Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way" alongside the command "Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest." He explains that even during the six weekdays of physical labor and material engagement, a hidden spark of holiness—called a sacred emissary (malach)—resides within every object and action. Because that divine life-force is clothed inside the garments of this world, it requires extra vigilance and protection so that we do not exchange its sacred purpose for mere physical appetite. Reciting blessings before partaking of the world or performing a mitzvah awakens our awareness of the divine emissary hidden within the physical act, ensuring that weekday life itself remains connected to Hashem (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Mishpatim 5631).

• In his 5631 discourse on Parshas Mishpatim, the Sfas Emes expounds the verse "And He will bless your bread and your water" ("You shall serve Hashem your God, and He will bless your bread and your water, and I will remove illness from your midst"), from which the Gemara (Berachos 48b) derives the obligation of blessings over food. Every loaf of bread and cup of water contains a hidden spark of divine vitality sent from Above as a sacred emissary (malach) to sustain human life. When a person consumes food coarsely for self-gratification, that physical indulgence breeds both bodily and spiritual malady. Reciting a blessing before and after eating acts as a spiritual grafting (melashon havrachah v'harkavah), bending the physical act of eating back toward its heavenly root and transforming nourishment itself into healing and divine service (Sfas Emes, Shemos, Mishpatim 5631).

• The parsha opens and He called to Moses — and the midrash derives the rule: before every divine utterance came a calling, in the language of affection. The Sfas Emes dwells on the wonder of it: the sacred mission (shelichus)—the receiving of the command—is greater than the deed itself. The prophets are called angels (mal'achim), for before prophecy the prophet is truly changed into the level of an angel; to receive the command and commission of the Holy One is a station higher than the performance. To bless before the mitzvah is to step for a moment into the prophet's station — to receive the command as a calling of affection — and only then to descend into the deed, carrying the supernal power of the blessing into the body of the mitzvah (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Vayikra 5642).

• In Parshas Vayishlach (5634), the Sfas Emes reflects on Rashi's distinction between the boast of Esav—"I have plenty" (yeish li rav)—and the humble declaration of Yaakov Avinu—"I have everything I need" (yeish li kol). Although Esav spoke the truth that he possessed far more wealth than he needed, Hashem bestows His hidden goodness upon the righteous in the exact measure required for their spiritual service, as it is written, "Those who fear Him lack nothing" (Tehillim 34:10). Reciting a blessing over every enjoyment attaches each gift to humility and dependence upon Hashem, keeping the heart an open vessel for divine blessing (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Vayishlach 5634).

MORAL DILEMMAS:

The Frankel family went away on a vacation for midwinter break. They stayed in an Airbnb rental near a beautiful lake. On Shabbos the family was about to start kiddush when they realized that they didn't have any grape juice or wine for kiddush. As they frantically searched the refrigerator, seven year old Leah announced that they used the grape juice to make frozen ice pops. All the grape juice was in the freezer in the form of popsicles. Leah asked her father if they could use the popsicles for kiddush. "I don't know, Leah", her father replied. "Kiddush is normally supposed to be in a liquid form. Also, kiddush is supposed to be made on grape juice with a brachah of borei pri hagafen. But do you make a Hagafen on a solid popsicle? Maybe we should wait until the popsicle defrosts, or perhaps see if we can find a Jewish person in this area from whom we can borrow?" Leah responded, "Why should being frozen make any difference? It's still the same grape juice, just colder. Perhaps you can use it for kiddush? Also why should you make a shehakol on the popsicle? It's just frozen grape juice." A similar question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Can you make kiddush on frozen grape juice popsicles? Also, do you make a shehakol or hagafen on frozen grape juice popsicles?

Answer: Regarding the question about the popsicles for Kiddush, Rav Zilberstein writes that Kiddush cannot be made on them because you can't swallow the Kiddush at one time. However he writes that the Bracha that would be made is Hagefen and not Shehakol. Please consult with your own Rav for any matters of practical Halacha.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Yoma, p. 475 (Table Talk Halachic Archive, Edition 219 (Yisro))

Zev lived in Eretz Yisrael in the area of Yehuda and Shomron. This area is known by the non-Jewish world as “The West Bank”. Obviously the security situation while living in Yehuda and Shomron was very different than living in Bnei Brak. Sadly, there were often reports of terrorists attacking the Jews who lived there. For this reason Zev went through military and arms training. To protect his family he always carried a sidearm. Zev wanted an expensive automatic rifle to provide even greater protection to his family. Finally after saving for a while, he was able to afford the $1000 rifle. The purchase gave him great joy. He felt that he would be able to protect his family to an even greater extent. Zev knew that one makes a bracha of Shehecheyanu or Hatov Vehameitiv when one buys a new car or expensive furniture. This new purchase of the rifle made him very happy. He asked the question of whether he should make a similar bracha on the purchase of this new gun. On one hand the gun was a utensil that brought him joy. He bought it with the intention to do the mitzvah of protecting his family from harm. On the other hand the fact that he needed a gun was a sad reminder of how dangerous the world was. Perhaps it would not be appropriate to make a bracha on a new gun, What do you think?

Answer: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein rules that one should not recite a blessing of Shehecheyanu or Hatov VeHaMeitiv upon acquiring a weapon, even if it provides significant protection and relief. Weapons of warfare are inherently sorrowful reminders of a fractured, dangerous world. True Jewish joy looks toward the Messianic era when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Yeshayahu 2:4) and weapons will be beaten into plowshares. An instrument of violence, even when acquired for defensive self-preservation, cannot serve as a vehicle for a blessing of thanksgiving and celebratory joy.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na, Vol. 3, p. 43

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach, once told some very esteemed students that they should always say Birkas Hamazon with a siddur. When they replied that they knew it by heart, he replied as follows. R' Chaim Ozer Grodzensky was the genius of geniuses. Once, a tzedakah ledger disappeared in Vilna. On two or three occasions, Rav Chaim Ozer had

looked through this ledger. Now that it was lost, he sat down and recorded from memory all the transactions listed in it. On the cover of the new ledger, he wrote, "Records of a Lost' Ledger, recorded here from memory." Later, the original ledger was found and it was identical, almost to the penny, with the one written by R' Chaim Ozer. Yet, said Rav Shach, R' Chaim Ozer would not recite Bircas HaMazon from memory. He read the words from a siddur, as an aid to concentration. Surely we have much to learn from how R' Chaim Ozer lived his life.

Five Great Leaders, By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Mottel, who was not a Gerrer chassid but descended from a family of Gerrer chassidim, was blessed with a baby girl. He came to the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur) for a berachah in honor of the simchah. After giving him a heartfelt berachah, the Rebbe asked, "Perhaps I can ask you a personal question?" Reb Mottel nodded in acquiescence, and the Rebbe continued, "Have you bought a present for your wife in honor of the simchah?" Clearly uncomfortable and wondering why the Rebbe had asked such a question, Reb Mottel answered affirmatively. "Why did you buy that specific present for her?" the Rebbe prodded. "Because," he answered, "I knew that this was what she wanted." "You did a good thing, the right thing," the Rebbe remarked, after which he put his head down for a moment. Then, he lifted his head and looked at Reb Mottel lovingly. "I would like to make a proposal. You know, Chazal say that there are three partners in a person: the father, the mother, and Hashem. Perhaps it is time to also give a present to the third partner. Do you know which present He really wants? He wants you to go to the beis medrash every day and learn for at least an hour..."

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ It was 1946, just months after the liberation. The Klausenberger Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam) had just returned from his first trip to America. He summoned the leaders of the Föhrenwald DP camp, whom he had appointed as treasurers during his absence, to hear an update on what had transpired while he was in America. During the meeting, some mezonos and drinks, including a bottle of whiskey, were brought to the table so that the Rebbe could make a l'chaim. Before partaking of the refreshments, the Rebbe asked, "Is there a siddur here?" "Why does the Rebbe need a siddur?" someone asked. "I made a kabbalah," the Rebbe explained, "that I will recite the berachah of Al HaMichyah only from a siddur." They looked for a siddur but could not find one, so the Rebbe would not eat. This is the same Rebbe whose memory was so strong that, despite having suffered terribly through the indescribable Nazi tortures, followed by a bout with typhus, he was able, just months after the war, to remember and write the difficult, obscure text of a kesubah by heart! This very same Rebbe with the prodigious memory refused to recite the berachah of Al HaMichyah by heart.

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivah Kol Torah in Jerusalem, recalls an incident which he witnessed as a boy. "Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld once attended a bar mitzvah at which he was asked to lead the bentching. As customary, a full cup of wine was brought, over which the bentching was recited. "Because it was Friday, the urgent business of preparing for Shabbos was on everyone's mind, and the meal had been hurried. The waiters had not even paused to clear the table, and the waiter who brought the cup of wine to R' Chaim was in such a hurry that he accidentally put down the cup in a dish which still contained leftover mashed potatoes, "R' Chaim, unperturbed, lifted the cup and proceeded to bentch. As he held the cup, a few drops of wine spilled from his cup into the dish with the mashed potatoes. After completing the bentching, he drank the cup of wine and then picked up the dish with its mixture of mashed potatoes and spilled wine, and drank the leftover wine. At the time, I was a boy of fifteen, and his behavior struck me as rather peculiar. Especially because Rav Chaim was known to be an istenus, a fastidious person. "It was only many years later, when I heard about R' Chaim's refined and even fastidious nature, that the real meaning of that odd gesture began to dawn on me. As I re-examined that scene in my mind's eye with the mature vision of my later years, I realized that what had seemed to me, as a boy, almost an act of gluttony was in fact only an expression of the immense value which every mitzvah had for R' Chaim' - a value which outweighed all other considerations, even his natural squeamishness. Not only did R' Chaim have no

appetite for those few drops of wine, his fastidiousness undoubtedly made it repugnant for him to drink from a dish containing someone else's leftovers. But when that same dish also contained a few drops of wine which had been used for a mitzvah, his fastidiousness evaporated entirely. His infinite love for a mitzvah and his infinite esteem for even the 'leftovers' of a mitzvah propelled him past the bounds of his own sensitive nature. This, then, was the meaning of the eagerness I had observed as a boy, so many years before."

Guardian of Jerusalem, By Rabbi Hillel Danziger, published by ArtScroll Mesorah, p. 205

❖ In the mid-1970s, the Chareidi community waged a well-known battle against the plans of Yerushalayim's secular mayor to build a soccer stadium in an area to the north called Shuafat. Rav Avrohom Dov Auerbach, a son of Reb Refoel Dovid and nephew of Reb Shlomo Zalman, recalls hearing the story behind the eventual cancellation of the plan from his uncle, Rav Menachem Porush, who was present as it unfolded. At one point during the lengthy saga, the Chareidi representatives on the city council, sensing that the mayor might be open to compromise, arranged a meeting of the entire council and the mayor at the home of Reb Shlomo Zalman. As the host, he began distributing refreshments, handing a drink to each attendee as he passed before him. But when it was the mayor's turn, Reb Shlomo Zalman refused to give him anything. Everyone was stunned, and the Chareidi council members were certain that any hope of reaching an accommodation with the anti-religious mayor had just been dashed. Stung by the slight, the mayor asked Reb Shlomo Zalman to explain. He said, "Your secular colleagues came in with their heads covered. This shows they understand that in this house they must act properly, so I can assume they'll make a brachah on their drinks, too. But you didn't bother to cover your head, so I assume you won't make a brachah either—and thus the halacha prohibits me from giving you anything to drink." (See Reb Shlomo Zalman's Minchas Shlomo, Kama, 35:1, where he rules permissively, but in circumstances unlike those in this story.) The meeting ended quickly thereafter, and the Chareidi council members left in a daze. Yet, not long afterward, the mayor decided to move the planned stadium out of Yerushalayim. In explaining his decision, one of the things he said was, "The meeting at Rav Auerbach's home was the first time I've ever met someone who is prepared to forgo everything for a halachah in Shulchan Aruch. For such a person, I'm prepared to move the stadium."

From Reb Shmuel, by R' Eytan Kobre, published by Judaica Press

❖ Sometimes it was just a tiny thought or sentence that could totally transform intense worry into hope. One family came to the Pnei Menachem (Rav Pinchas Menachem Alter of Gur) the day before a family member was scheduled to undergo a serious, complex operation. The Rebbe dispensed his berachah and then spontaneously went to a back room and came out with an expensive bottle of wine, which he presented with the following instructions: "I want you to save this bottle for the seudas hodaah!" Those few words replaced the gripping sense of desperation and worry with a profound sense of hope. It was the light in the darkness that allowed them to anticipate making it through the next period with hope that there would be good times once again.

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Reb Shea, a man of means, would merit a visit from Rabbi Rothenberg from time to time. They'd speak for a while, enjoying each other's company, and then, Reb Shea would write out a generous check for the yeshivah. On one such visit, Reb Shea sadly informed Rav Shlomo that he had recently lost his money and was unable to give his usual donation. Rav Shlomo comforted him, "No need to worry, Reb Shea. Our friendship is deep and real-it's not based on money. In future summers, I will continue to visit you, and we will enjoy each other's company just like before. I give you a brachah that you should be able to build up your business and be on the giving end once more. But, even when you have the money again, I don't want a penny of your income, lest anyone think that our relationship is based on it." And so it was. Although Reb Shea was eventually able to get back on his feet, Rav Shlomo would continue to visit him without ever again asking him for his financial support.

From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ Two years prior to the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel's passing, a Hatzolah call was registered that Reb Nosson Zvi was choking. Needless to say, Hatzolah volunteers flew through the door and the situation was quickly stabilized. Dr. Adler arrived a few minutes later and suggested that because of the Rosh Yeshivah's weakened state, it would be indicated to go to the hospital and have an X-ray performed to verify that nothing went down the wrong way. The doctor had spoken Reb Nosson Zvi was strapped to a stretcher in the dining room and the troops were ready to move, but the Rosh Yeshivah raised his hand to signal, "Not so fast." A look of concern darted across the room as everyone waited to hear what the Rosh Yeshivah had to say. Reb Nosson Zvi gesticulated for his wife, so everyone took a mini-step backward to afford a little more privacy. As it happened, he had something very important to say and no one was going anywhere until she brought him a bencher.

For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Published by Feldheim, p. 278

❖ Reb Mendel Kaplan would say "One of the great people of the previous generation said, 'If we said Bircas Hamazon properly, we would realize that food was created to give us the opportunity to bless Hashem for it.'."

Reb Mendel, By Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

D. TO SAY BIRKAS HATORAH

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-13

As it says "when I call the name of Hashem, let us bring greatness to our G-d. (Devarim 32:3, Parshas Haazinu)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

It is a biblical commandment to recite a blessing before studying Torah (Birchos HaTorah), as Scripture states: "When I call upon the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our God" (Devarim 32:3).

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Traditionally, when people daven Ma'ariv for the amud, they start praying out loud from the words, Ki heim chayeinu--For they [the words of Torah] are our life.' But when the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, would daven for the amud, he'd always start earlier, with the words, V'nismach b'divrei sorasecha, And we shall rejoice in the words of Your Torah.' That was the Rosh Yeshivah's life's goal: to make learning and life sweeter and more enjoyable, to take away the friction in learning and to love all the beautiful things that being a Yid has to offer." The Rosh Yeshivah cried as he davened, V'ha'arev na Hashem- "Please, Hashem, let the Torah be sweet for my talmidim!" He would bentch his talmidim, "May the One Above pour out His unlimited and boundless blessings upon you, and may following Hashem's ways be so sweet to you that it will feel superfluous for you to say the words, 'V'ha'arev na' in Birkas HaTorah!"

From Rav Shlomo Rothenberg, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

E. TO BENCH GOMEL

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-39

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Four categories of individuals are obligated to give thanks and offer public praise to Hashem by reciting the blessing of thanksgiving (Birkas HaGomel): those who journeyed across the sea, those who traversed the desert, one who recovered from serious illness, and one who was released from imprisonment.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

A prisoner in a minimum security correctional facility had all his physical needs provided for and preferred remaining incarcerated. When his sentence expired, the warden released him against his personal wishes. Halachah mandates that one released from prison recites Birkas HaGomel. Is a person who is released from prison against his will obligated to recite Birkas HaGomel?

Answer: He should not recite the blessing. Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein explains that Birkas HaGomel is instituted exclusively as a prayer of heartfelt thanksgiving for salvation from distress; since this individual considers his release unwelcome and not a deliverance, reciting the blessing would be devoid of genuine gratitude and improper.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Berachos, p. 341

A Holocaust survivor in the Kovno Ghetto asked whether inmates who survived a terrifying Nazi 'aktion' (mass liquidation raid) are obligated to recite the blessing of thanksgiving (Birkas HaGomel) in the ghetto synagogue, or does doing so offer false hope while still trapped behind barbed wire?

Answer: Rav Ephraim Oshry ruled that one may not recite Birchas HaGomel (even without Hashem's Name) after surviving a ghetto liquidation raid ('Aktion') while still imprisoned behind the electrified barbed-wire walls of the ghetto. First, under Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 219; Eliyah Rabbah; Mishnah Berurah and Bi'ur Halachah), a prisoner in captivity or a person in mortal danger only recites HaGomel once he has been completely freed from captivity and delivered from danger ('ad she-yeitzei min ha-tzarah legamrei'). While still trapped inside the ghetto under a standing Nazi death sentence, the danger has not passed. Second, reciting HaGomel would foster a dangerous false illusion of safety ('tikvas shav') that the liquidation was over—playing directly into the Nazis' calculated deception designed to lull the remaining Jews into complacency so they would not attempt to escape or hide.

— Source: Rav Ephraim Oshry, She'eilos U'Teshuvos MiMa'amakim, Vol. 1, Siman 7

A woman who had endured prolonged marital distress finally received a get (religious divorce) from her husband and recited the blessing of Shehecheyanu out of intense joy at obtaining her freedom. Is it halachically appropriate to recite Shehecheyanu upon receiving a divorce, and should listeners answer Amen upon hearing it?

Answer: The Bracha was not appropriate and Amen should not be said.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Berachos, p. 369

F. TO HEAR THE WORDS OF THE BERACHAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37-3, 47-16

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Whenever reciting any blessing, it is a mitzvah to enunciate the words clearly enough for one's own ears to hear what his mouth utters (hashma'as ozen). Even regarding the silent recitation of the Shemoneh Esrei, one must articulate each word distinctly with his lips so that his own ears can hear his whisper; however, he must not raise his voice so much that a companion praying nearby can hear him.

G. TO ANSWER AMEN TO A BERACHAH

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-27

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person is obligated to answer Amen upon hearing any blessing recited, as Scripture states: "Open the gates, that the righteous nation who preserves faithfulness (shomer emunim) may enter" (Yeshayahu 26:2) — which Chazal expounded homiletically: do not read emunim ("faithfulness"), but she'omrim amen ("those who say Amen").

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ One of Rav Shimson Pincus's daughters was born less than two weeks before her brother's bar mitzvah. Rav Shimshon debated whether or not to make a kiddush immediately that week because he was hosting a huge kiddush the following week in honor of the bar mitzvah. If he would wait, he could make a double kiddush, a kiddush in honor of the double simchah, the bar mitzvah and his daughter's birth. Rav Pincus recalled: "I almost decided not to make the kiddush, but on second thought determined that just because her brother's bar mitzvah fell two weeks later, who was I to deny my newborn daughter hundreds of berachos that would be designated exclusively for her? Who knows what these berachos would do for her throughout her life, so lo and behold, we hosted two consecutive kiddushes, one week after the next!" Indeed, time would reveal how desperately that girl would need those heartfelt brachos one day. Many years later, following a tragic accident that claimed the lives of both her parents and sister, this daughter's life hung in the balance for many months. Yet, through prayers, miracles, and presumably the blessings she received as an infant, she emerged from danger and made a full recovery.

From The Life Of Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, Published by Feldheim

H. TO SAY 100 BRACHOS EVERY DAY

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 38-15

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person is obligated to recite one hundred blessings (me'ah berachos) every day. This requirement is alluded to in the verse: "And now, Yisroel, what (mah) does Hashem your God ask of you..." (Devarim 10:12) — which Chazal expounded: do not read mah ("what"), but rather me'ah ("one hundred").

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The Brisker Rav was extremely careful to fulfill the requirement mentioned in the Gemara" that one must make a hundred berachos every day. He would stop at certain specified times and take account of all the berachos he had made that day. This was in accordance with the Rambam "And one must count all the blessings every day to be sure to say at least one hundred". Once, on Shabbos, he was waiting in his home for Minchah to begin. One of the members of the congregation, Dr. Aharonov, took the opportunity to ask The Brisker Rav the following question: "Before Shabbos, I buy myself a supply of sunflower seeds to snack on, so that over the course of the day I will be sure to make one hundred blessings, something that can be very difficult to accomplish on Shabbos." You don't do this, so how do you manage to reach one hundred blessings?" "So far today I have made such-and-such number of berachos," answered The Brisker Rav, quoting the exact number. "If we add to these the berachos I will say between now and the end of Shabbos (and he then listed them), I will reach the required number."

The Brisker Rav, Vol. 2, by Rabbi Shimon Yosef Meller, p. 458

TESHUVAH: SELF-REFLECTION, REPENTANCE, AND RETURN

SECTION OVERVIEW

The mitzvos in this section all relate to the mitzvah of doing teshuvah. This mitzvah teaches us to continuously strive to improve and correct our character so that we can come close to Hashem.

12. To Return to Hashem Through Repentance (Teshuvah)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 33

As the Torah says, When a man or woman commit any sin… then they shall confess their sin (Bamidbar 5:6-7, Parshas Nasso).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Which three steps are required for teshuvah?
- If one reads a vidui by rote is that significant?
- Why do we need to do teshuvah if Yom Kippur atones for our sins?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

This commandment obligates a person to articulate a verbal confession (vidui) before Hashem. He must declare from the depths of his heart: "I beseech You, Hashem: I have sinned unintentionally (chatasi), I have acted iniquitously (avisi), and I have rebelled willfully (pashati) before You. Specifically, I committed such-and-such an act (detailing the sin explicitly); I have felt deep remorse, I am ashamed of my conduct, and I resolve never to repeat this act again."

The core foundation of repentance (teshuvah) is heartfelt, genuine remorse over past misdeeds, joined with a firm personal commitment never to repeat the transgression. Verbal confession is the indispensable practical fulfillment of this inner return; and whoever elaborates in confession and pours out his heart before Hashem is exceedingly praiseworthy.

Even one's eventual death and the solemn confession recited on Yom Kippur effect no atonement or forgiveness unless they are accompanied by sincere inner repentance.

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The Torah is the manual of how to perfect ourselves, become similar to Hashem, and consequently come close to Hashem. Whenever we stray from this ideal, we have the opportunity to correct our mistakes and once again turn back to Hashem to continue to strive to resemble Him.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMBAM — MOREH NEVUCHIM (3:36)

When a person knows that he can correct his mistake, he is inspired to correct it, and avoid that in the future. If a person couldn't correct his mistakes, he would give up, and continue the same errors.

SEFER HACHINUCH

Through vidui, confession one expresses that he believes that Hashem sees all that happens in the world including his hidden sins.

RAMCHAL — DERECH HASHEM (4:6)

Vidui has the effect of closing the mouths of the mekatrigim. We do it during tefillah so it will prevent our tefillah from being pushed aside.

PACHAD YITZCHAK

The vidui has the effect of expelling the ra. We are taking it out of ourselves.

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 4)

Teshuvah is a supernatural gift of Divine mercy (midas harachamim). In the physical universe, an act once committed cannot be undone. Yet through teshuvah, Hashem established that uprooting one's inner will and regret (akiras ratzon) retroactively dissolves the spiritual reality of the deed (k'akiras ma'aseh), modeled on the annulment of a vow (hataras nedarim).

SFAS EMES

• One of the shortest statements of the Sfas Emes may also be the most fundamental: The essence of teshuvah is attachment to the beginning. The Sfas Emes says this while discussing the mitzvah of Bikkurim. A farmer works for months until his land finally produces fruit. When the first fruit appears, he marks it and eventually brings it to the Beis HaMikdash. He takes the product that emerged at the end of a long process and reconnects it to its beginning. He remembers that the land, the rain, the strength to work, the history that brought Klal Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, and the fruit itself all began with Hashem. Returning to the shoresh therefore gives teshuvah its most literal meaning. The person comes home to the source of his life (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Ki Savo 5637).

• The chet ha'Eigel and the breaking of the first Luchos created one of the greatest tragedies in Jewish history. The Sfas Emes explains that the letters engraved upon the Luchos reflected the inner engraving within the hearts of the Children of Israel (chakikah be-libos Bnei Yisrael). Through the sin, Klal Yisrael lost its ability to receive that inner engraving fully. After forgiveness and purification on Yom Kippur: The engraving in the heart returned. The Luchos Acharonos therefore express the possibility of receiving Torah after failure. This is one reason the Sfas Emes connects the end of the teshuvah season so closely with renewed Torah. Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah belong to one spiritual movement: purification, return, and then a new reception of Torah from the place reached through teshuvah (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Sukkos 5647).

• The Sfas Emes makes a remarkable statement: There is always teshuvah, even for someone who is a tzaddik. This reveals the ultimate breadth of the concept. Teshuvah begins with the repair of sin, yet its destination is described by the words "all the way to Hashem your God" (ad Hashem Elokecha). The goal reaches all the way toward Hashem. Since closeness to Hashem has no finite limit, teshuvah also has no final limit. The Sfas Emes therefore writes that after the person has repaired the actual sin and begun approaching Hashem, there is another teshuvah: only then does a higher return become possible. The tzaddik continues returning from limitation. Both movements point toward the same infinite Source (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shabbos Teshuvah 5638).

• Why must teshuvah be expressed through speech? Why is confession, "And they shall confess" (ve-hisvadu), such an essential part of the process? The Sfas Emes builds his answer upon the different levels of the human being. The Torah describes sin with the words "and that soul becomes guilty" (ve-ashmah ha-nefesh). The pegam of sin attaches especially to the soul (nefesh), the dimension of life most closely involved with physical action. The human being also possesses spirit (ruach), associated with his higher power of speech. This gives verbal confession unusual dignity. The words of vidui are part of the mechanism by which one level of the person repairs another (Sfas Emes, Bamidbar, Naso 5650).

• The prophet Hoshea calls upon Klal Yisrael: "Take words with you and return to Hashem; say to Him: 'Forgive all iniquity and accept good'" (Hoshea 14:3). What do the words "and accept good" add? Once the sin has been removed, what "good" is there left to take? The Sfas Emes explains that the world contains mixtures of goodness (tov) and spiritual dross (pesolet). Even when a spiritual power (koach) becomes involved in sin, the underlying life-force originally came from Hashem. The task of teshuvah is therefore one of spiritual clarification (birur): "to burn away the dross and rescue the holy spark that became trapped within the sin." Teshuvah can rescue it. The person may therefore emerge with capacities that had previously been misused—passion, ambition, courage, sensitivity, intelligence—and return those very strengths to kedushah (Sfas Emes, Moadim, Shabbos Teshuvah 5655).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

- Discuss the miracle of Teshuvah, of how it changes you, changes the past and changes the future
- Discuss how teshuvah means to return to your true self, as well as return to Hashem
- Discuss the Rambam's list of things that are difficult to do teshuvah for
- Discuss the 20 steps for teshuvah listed in Sharei Teshuva

MORAL DILEMMAS:

Chaim and Dovid lived on the same block and had been close friends for years. Then something happened. Maybe it was a parking issue, maybe a money issue, but whatever it was, it turned into a major machlokes. The argument became public, and so did their anger. Dovid told Chaim, "After what you did to me, I am never going to forgive you." Chaim shot back, "Good. I don't want your forgiveness, and I am never going to ask you for it!" It was painful to watch. Two former friends were no longer speaking to each other, and both had publicly declared that they had no interest in making peace. They had a mutual friend named Eli who could not bear seeing them this way. Eli remembered how Chazal describe Aharon HaKohen as oheiv shalom v'rodef shalom, one who loved peace and pursued peace. Aharon HaKohen would sometimes approach two people who were fighting and help each one believe that the other truly wanted to reconcile. But Eli knew that would never work here. Chaim and Dovid were too angry. If Eli told Dovid, "Chaim really wants to make peace," Dovid would probably answer, "I don't care." Then Eli came up with another idea.

Eli happened to be an excellent imitator. One day, he picked up the phone and called Dovid. "Dovid," he said, perfectly imitating Chaim's voice, "this is Chaim." Then Eli began to cry. "I know you are very angry at me, but I can't handle this anymore. Please forgive me. I am begging you. Please find it in your heart to forgive me for what I did." Dovid was stunned. At first he resisted. "I told you already. I wasn't interested in making peace." But "Chaim" kept crying. Finally Dovid softened. "Okay," he said. "Honestly, I wasn't planning to forgive you. But you called me yourself, and I can't bear hearing you cry like this. If it means that much to you, I forgive you." Eli hung up thrilled. He had done it! Dovid had actually said the words, "I forgive you." Eli later told Chaim that Dovid had forgiven him, although he did not explain exactly how he had obtained the mechilah. But as Yom Kippur approached, Eli began thinking about what he had done. Chazal teach that Yom Kippur does not atone for sins between one person and another until the person who was hurt is appeased. And then Eli remembered Dovid's exact words. Dovid had not simply said, "I forgive Chaim." He had said, "Because you called me yourself, because you are crying, and because you are begging me to forgive you, I forgive you." But none of that had actually happened. Chaim had never called. Chaim had never cried. Chaim had never asked Dovid for forgiveness. It was all Eli. Now Eli had a serious dilemma. Perhaps the mechilah was still valid. After all, Dovid clearly knew whom he was forgiving, and he explicitly said that he forgave Chaim. Or perhaps the forgiveness was based entirely on a false impression. Had Dovid known that Chaim had never called him at all, maybe he never would have forgiven him. And if Eli now told Dovid the truth, he might reignite the entire machlokes he had worked so hard to settle. Was Dovid's mechilah valid even though Eli obtained it through deception? Or must Chaim now approach Dovid himself and ask for genuine forgiveness before Yom Kippur? What do you think?

Answer: Regarding the question about the "fake forgiveness," Rav Zilberstein ruled that it was not a valid mechilah. This case is different from what Aharon HaKohen did. Aharon actually brought the two parties closer together, until they met and genuinely reconciled. Here, however, Dovid only forgave Chaim because he believed that Chaim was deeply remorseful. At the same time, Rav Zilberstein cautioned that Eli must proceed very carefully so as not to make the machlokes even worse. Eli should approach Chaim and explain, "I told you that Dovid forgave you, but in truth, I was the one who called him, and he forgave you because he thought I was you." Eli should then advise Chaim, "If you truly want Dovid's mechilah, approach him before Yom Kippur and say, 'Could you please be mochel me b'lev shalem, with a complete heart?'" From Dovid's perspective, it will seem as though Chaim is asking for mechilah a second time. But in reality, from Chaim's perspective, this will be the first time he is genuinely asking for forgiveness.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed, Niddah, p. 289

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Meshulem lost everything in the war—everything. He was all alone. But even more than that, he was angry, and he decided that he was done with Torah, done with mitzvos. His friends tried to convince him otherwise, but to no avail. Meshulem was not willing to listen to anyone. "But, Meshulem," his friends pressured, "the Klausenburger Rebbe is in the camp. Why don't you go to him? He knows how to give chizuk." "I don't need chizuk," Meshulem retorted bitterly. "I saw everything with my own eyes. I saw what they did. I am done with chizuk! I want nothing more to do with G-d or religion." His friends were persistent, and finally, Meshulem relented. "Fine!" he snapped. "I'll go to him, but on one condition—The Klausenberger Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam) should not speak one word to me about Yiddishkeit." The Rebbe agreed. Meshulem walked in, and before the Rebbe could even say a word, Meshulem said, "Please ask me only 'yes' or 'no' questions. I will not answer with more than one word!" The Rebbe asked him, "Are you angry?" "Of course!" "Why?" the Rebbe asked. "What kind of question is that?" Meshulem exclaimed. "I lost holy parents, brothers, and sisters. All of them were tzaddikim. And me!" he exploded. "I was always the black sheep. I was a nothing! Yet, I am the one who remained alive. Is that called Hashgachah? Is that called Hashem running the world?" "This also happened to you?" the Rebbe cried out in astonishment. "Just like it happened to me? I also lost parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, my wife, and all of my

eleven children. I, the lowest of them all, am also the only one who remained alive!" The Rebbe then put his hand on Meshulem's shoulder and began to cry, tears coursing down his cheeks. Meshulem also began to cry, shaking with sobs, bitter tears streaming from his eyes. One minute passed, two minutes... a full twenty minutes of heaving, cleansing crying. When R' Meshulem, who had come to the New York area to spend Yom Tov with his children in Flatbush, told this story to Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Rabbi Krohn asked him, "So, what made you do teshuvah and start living as a Yid again?" "Those twenty minutes!" was his reply. "At that meeting, the Rebbe didn't speak to my brain. He spoke to my heart! After crying for those twenty minutes, after unburdening all the pain and anger from my heart, I was able to do teshuvah and start keeping mitzvos again."

From The Klausenberger Rebbe, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

❖ In R' Nochum's youth, there lived a man named Berel who had strayed from the Torah and become a feared moser (informer to the authorities). Townspeople complied with his every whim lest he inform on them, allowing him to take merchandise from shops and market stalls without paying. Craving honor as well, Berel demanded to be called up for shishi every Shabbos. Out of fear that Berel would retaliate against their beloved rav if confronted, the townspeople never breathed a word of Berel's crimes to the rav. Early one market day, a Jewish farmer from a distant village set up his wagon of produce. Berel approached, selected a large quantity of the finest fruit, and began walking away without paying. When the villager grabbed his collar and demanded payment, Berel sneered, "Everyone here gives me everything for free! Ask around about Reb Berel—if you treat me this way, you'll regret it." Outraged, the villager went straight to the rav's house and recounted the theft. Surprised that a man who received shishi every week would act thus, the rav sent his trembling assistant to summon Berel immediately. Twice Berel insolently refused to come, telling the rav not to meddle. The rav promised the villager he would personally see that he was paid. Furious that the rav had challenged his authority, Berel decided to humiliate him publicly. That Shabbos, he ordered the frightened gabbai to give him the rav's customary shlishi aliyah and relegate the rav to shishi. The gabbai could not bring himself to dishonor the tzaddik and called the rav for shlishi as usual. When Berel was called for shishi, the rav ascended the bimah and declared, "Someone else must be called for shishi!" When the replacement approached, Berel shoved him away. The rav stepped forward and slapped Berel across the face; Berel, in shock and rage, slapped the rav back and stormed out of shul, vowing vengeance upon the rav. Concerned for their rav's life, the townspeople assigned two talmidim—including R' Nochum Shadiker—to guard him day and night. Soon after, a messenger invited the rav to serve as sandek at a bris in a neighboring town. Along the road, the terrified talmidim spotted a band of armed men approaching, led by Berel himself. While the students silently wished they could destroy the wicked informer, the rav glanced up calmly from his learning and continued his contemplation. When Berel reached the wagon and came face to face with the rav, the fury on his face melted into awe and love. "Please forgive me, Rebbe, for my sins against you!" Berel wept, though he still asked permission to take revenge on the two students beside him. "These are my students," the rav replied gently, and he spoke to Berel's heart until the informer broke down in tears of sincere teshuvah, vowing to abandon his evil ways. Once they were alone, the astonished students asked how this transformation had occurred. The rav explained: "When danger approached, I recalled how Yaakov Avinu prepared to meet Eisav by uprooting all hatred from his heart. As Mishlei (27:19) teaches, 'As water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of man to man.' I judged Berel favorably, realizing that we were also at fault for bowing to him rather than rebuking him with love, until every trace of anger left my heart. Because my heart was filled only with compassion for him, his heart mirrored mine and melted in repentance. You two, however, still harbored hatred toward him in your hearts—and that is why he still felt anger toward you."

Visions of Greatness, Vol. 3, By Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Published by CIS Publishers

A. TO MAKE A CHESHBON HANEFESH, AN ACCOUNTING OF YOUR DAY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-30

As it says "therefore the rulers have said let us make a calculation (Bamidbar 21:27, Parshas Chukas)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught that a person should conduct a rigorous spiritual accounting of his soul (cheshbon hanefesh) each night before going to sleep, examining his deeds and repenting (teshuvah) for any missteps of that day. Those who practice this daily introspection are called "masters of reckoning," as alluded to in the verse: "Therefore the rulers say: Come, let us make a reckoning" (Bamidbar 21:27) — which Chazal expounded as referring to those who master their evil inclination (moshelim b'yitzram) and calculate the true spiritual profit and loss of their actions.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 3)

This world is like a maze that presents two fundamental dangers: one can fail to see the real traps, and even worse, one can mistake a dangerous path for a desirable one. To navigate successfully, one must take counsel from the masters who have already completed the maze and now stand atop the observation tower, rather than relying on those who are still lost within it. Their greatest counsel is to conduct a daily cheshbon hanefesh through two practices: Pishpush (examining one's general actions to identify missing mitzvos or hidden transgressions) and Mishmush (scrutinizing even one's good deeds to ensure they are free of ulterior motives such as pride, honor, or complacency).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ In Pirkei Avos (2:10), Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus taught: 'And repent one day before your death!' It once happened that when Rabbi Eliezer taught this statement in the study hall, his disciples looked at him in wonder and asked: 'Our Master, does a human being know on which day he will die, that he could know when to repent one day beforehand?' Rabbi Eliezer answered them: 'All the more reason! Because no person knows what tomorrow will bring, let him say in his heart every single morning: I will repent and mend my ways today, lest I depart from the world tomorrow! And by doing so, every single day of his life will be lived in wholehearted repentance and peace with his Creator—and this is what King Solomon meant when he wrote (Ecclesiastes 9:8): At all times let your garments be white, and let oil never lack upon your head!'

Avos DeRabbi Nosson, Recension B 29:9

B. TO REMEMBER THE AVEIROS DONE BY OUR FOREFATHERS, SO WE DO NOT REPEAT THE MISTAKES OF HISTORY

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-22

As it says, "Remember, ... how you have angered Hashem your G-d in the desert" (Devarim 9:7, Parshas Eikev).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture commands: "Remember, do not forget, how you provoked Hashem your God to wrath in the wilderness" (Devarim 9:7). The Sifrei explains that "remember" mandates verbal recollection with the mouth, while "do not forget" mandates mindful retention in the heart. Several authorities, notably the Ramban, maintain that this constitutes an enduring positive commandment binding upon all future generations; and one must conduct himself stringently regarding a doubtful biblical obligation (safek d'Oraisa l'chumra).

C. NOT TO FORGET THE AVEIROS DONE BY OUR FOREFATHERS

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-13

As it says, "do not forget how you have angered Hashem your G-d in the desert" (Devarim 9:7, Parshas Eikev).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states: "...Do not forget how you provoked Hashem your God to wrath in the wilderness" (Devarim 9:7). Authorities explain that this negative injunction was not addressed merely to the generation of the desert alone, but was commanded perpetually to all generations — so that we remain humbled and ashamed before Him, and all the more so recall our own personal misdeeds with deep contrition.

D. NOT TO FORGET THE AVEIROS YOU HAVE DONE

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 12-23

As it says, "and you will confess your sins and the sins of your fathers" (Vayikra 26:40, Parshas Bechukosai)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

If the Torah commands us to remember how our ancient ancestors provoked Hashem in the wilderness, it is an even greater obligation for every individual to recall how he himself has provoked Hashem from his youth onward. We are likewise obligated to remember the transgressions of our more recent forebears, as Scripture states: "And they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers" (Vayikra 26:40). One must do this so that he is humbled in contrition before Him, thereby breaking the callous blockage of the heart (lev he'arel). This mitzvah of personal remembrance is an obligation that applies every single day.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Regarding the verse, 'Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your God' (Hoshea 14:2), Shlomo said through Divine inspiration: 'From the fruit of a man's mouth he shall be satisfied with good, and the deeds of a man's hands shall be returned to him' (Mishlei 12:14). Concerning whom did Shlomo say this verse? Only concerning the repentance of Reuven! Rabbi Elazar taught: When Yosef's brothers sold him, where had Reuven been? He had been sitting in sackcloth and fasting in private repentance over the earlier incident of his father's couch! Only when he finished his fast did he return and peer into the pit

—'And Reuven returned to the pit, and behold, Yosef was not in the pit, and he tore his clothes' (Bereishis 37:29). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'Reuven! No person had ever repented before me until you began first with teshuvah, and you sought to return a beloved son to your father. By your life, your descendant—the prophet Hoshea ben Be'eri from the tribe of Reuven—will stand and open the gates of complete teshuvah for all of Israel to return to their Father in Heaven, proclaiming: Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your God!' To what is this comparable? To a province that rebelled against the king, and the king sent an envoy to destroy it. Because that envoy was wise and compassionate, he told the townspeople: 'Take an oath upon yourselves right now that you will no longer rebel against the king, so that the king will not do to you what he did to the other rebellious provinces!' So too Hoshea ben Be'eri pleaded with Israel: 'My children, repent now, so that the Holy One, blessed be He, will not do to you as He did to exiled Shomron!'

Pesikta Rabbati, Supplement A 3:5

E. TO ACCEPT REPROOF

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 11-2

As it says "and you shall circumcise the blockage of your heart" (Devarim 10:16, Parshas Eikev).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

The mitzvah to accept ethical reproof (tochachah) is rooted in the heart, as Scripture states: "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart" (Devarim 10:16). It is likewise dependent upon the ear, as Scripture proclaims: "An ear that hears life-giving reproof will abide among the wise" (Mishlei 15:31).

F. TO LOVE AND APPRECIATE THE PERSON WHO OFFERS REPROOF

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 9-32

As it says "and you shall circumcise the blockage of your heart" (Devarim 10:16, Parshas Eikev).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states: "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart" (Devarim 10:16). This teaches that a person's heart must remain tender and receptive to accept the words of one who rebukes him, without harboring resentment or hatred toward him. On the contrary, one should love the rebuker all the more, as Scripture states: "Reprove a wise man, and he will love you" (Mishlei 9:8).

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ It was taught in a Braisa: Rabbi Tarfon said: "I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who knows how to accept reproof! If one says to his fellow, 'Remove the tiny splinter from between your eyes,' he immediately retorts, 'Remove the heavy wooden beam from between your own eyes!'" Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: "I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who knows how to give reproof gently without embarrassing his fellow!" And Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri declared: "I call Heaven and Earth to witness that many times Akiva was reprimanded by our teacher Rabban Shimon ben

Gamliel because I expressed concern to our master about Akiva's conduct—and yet every single time, Akiva only increased his love and affection for me, fulfilling what is written in Scripture (Proverbs 9:8): 'Do not reprove a scorner, lest he hate you; reprove a wise person, and he will love you!'"

Talmud Bavli, Arachin 16b

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ Once Rav Aryeh Levine discovered that a few members of a different Jewish community (originating from a different part of the world) who lived quite near him, did not treat their wives with respect. The next Shabbath he went to their Synagogue and asked to be allowed to preach in the late afternoon, between minchah and maariv (the evening service). His subject would be a Man's duty to respect the woman who shared his life. His former teacher in Lithuania, the renowned scholar R. Isser Zalman Meltzer (of blessed memory) was living then in the neighborhood, and he came to this synagogue to join in the prayers and listen to the sermon. When it was over he approached Reb Aryeh and said, "Your words touched my heart deeply. I have taken a good account of my conduct, and you have made me aware how I fall short of my obligations toward my dear wife. From now on, however, I will know how to improve my attitude toward her." "Imagine that," Reb Aryeh replied. "I was directing my words mainly at one of the regular worshippers there. (I hear that he treats his wife miserably.) And he did not realize it at all - my words hardly affected him. But my dear master teacher, you certainly give your wife respect. On the contrary, I am certain that there is much I can learn from you on how to treat a wife with esteem." "Well," said R. Isser Zalman, "my Beyleh Hindeh copies out my chidushim, my novel thoughts in the Talmud, in her clear and pretty handwriting, so that I can give them to printers. Sometimes she makes an error in the copying, and I get upset. But from now on, I will be much more careful!"

A Tzadik in Our Times, By Simcha Raz, Published by Feldheim

❖ When the Imrei Emes (Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter) was a young child, his grandfather (the Sfas Emes, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter) scolded him for not waking up on time. In truth, he had woken up on time and his grandfather had simply not noticed him in shul. The Imrei Emes stood meekly as his grandfather reprimanded him. After it was over, one of his friends, who had witnessed the incident, asked him, "Why didn't you say something to your grandfather? Why didn't you tell him that you were there for davening on time?" The young boy answered, "And miss out on the chance to hear real tochachah from my grandfather, my rebbi? Never!"

Touched By Their Tears, By Rabbi Yechiel Spero, published by ArtScroll Mesorah

G. NOT TO DISREGARD REPROOF

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 21-26

As it says, Do not harden your neck anymore" (Devarim 10:16, Parshas Eikev).

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Scripture states: "...And be stiff-necked no more" (Devarim 10:16). After charging us with an active positive commandment to embrace ethical rebuke and love the one who offers it — as it is said, "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart" (Devarim 10:16) — the Torah reiterates this admonition as a negative commandment, strictly prohibiting a person from obstinately hardening his neck or rejecting reproof.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 5)

Mockery (leitzanus) is the greatest barrier to accepting reproof. Just as soldiers coated their armor with grease to cause arrows to slip harmlessly away, mockery coats a person's heart and deflects the sharpest arrows of ethical inspiration. A person must guard his heart from cynicism so that words of reproof can penetrate and bring healing.

H. TO SEEK AND LISTEN TO WISE ADVICE ABOUT ALL WORLDLY MATTERS

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 37-4

SEFER CHAREIDIM

King Shlomo commanded that in all worldly and practical affairs, a person should seek out sound guidance: "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, so that you may become wise in your latter days" (Mishlei 19:20).

I. NOT TO THINK THAT HASHEM WON'T PUNISH YOU FOR YOUR AVEIROS

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 44-3

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Our Sages taught: "Do not despair of retribution" (Pirkei Avos 1:7), meaning a person must never presume himself immune from divine judgment. One should always recognize the fragility of mortal existence — aware that illness, poverty, tragedy, or bereavement can strike at any moment — as Scripture states: "Praiseworthy is the person who is constantly vigilant in fear" (Mishlei 28:14), ever turning to the Almighty to implore His mercy.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 4)

Yiras ha'onesh requires remembering that even the greatest tzaddikim were held to exacting standards for their slightest flaws. Hashem is not a "vatran" who arbitrarily overlooks wrongdoing; rather, His compassion operates through structured spiritual avenues such as teshuvah and yisurim. Just as we trust that Hashem rewards every minute good deed, so must we realize that accountability is precise.

STORIES FROM OUR SAGES:

❖ Our Rabbis taught: An incident occurred in a certain town where a venomous reptile (arod) was injuring people. They came and informed Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. He said to them: 'Show me its hole!' They showed him its hole, and he placed his heel directly over the opening of the burrow. The arod came out, bit him, and died on the spot! Rabbi Chanina lifted

the dead reptile onto his shoulder, carried it into the study hall, and declared to his students: 'See, my sons—it is not the arod that kills, but sin that kills!' In that hour they said: 'Woe to the person who encounters an arod, and woe to the arod that encounters Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa!'

Berachos 33a

J. TO SAY BEHAB

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 40-7

As it says "If you walk accidentally with me, I will walk with you with the fury of accident" (Vayikra 26:21-28, Parshas Bechukosai)

SEFER CHAREIDIM

When misfortune or catastrophe befalls the community, there is a rabbinic mitzvah to decree fasts on Monday, Thursday, and the following Monday (BeHaB) until Heaven grants mercy. This responsive fasting is a fundamental pathway of repentance (teshuvah). If people fail to awaken and instead dismiss tragedy as mere happenstance (keri), they display a callous attitude about which Scripture warns: "And if you walk with Me casually [attributing events to chance], then I will walk with you in the fury of chance" (Vayikra 26:21–28). This means: "When I bring adversity upon you to awaken your hearts to repentance, if you dismiss it as random chance, I will intensify the fury of that perceived chance upon you."

K. TO ENVY THOSE WHO ARE GREATER THAN YOU SPIRITUALLY

(Scripturally Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 35-28

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A person should cultivate a holy emulation and envy of those who are God-fearing, striving to emulate their righteous ways, as Scripture states: "Let not your heart envy sinners, but remain zealous in the fear of Hashem all day long" (Mishlei 23:17). This teaches that one should look upon those who revere Hashem with a constructive jealousy that inspires personal spiritual growth. As our Sages taught: "The jealousy of scholars increases wisdom" (Bava Basra 21a); and Scripture proclaims: "Behold, the fear of Hashem, that is wisdom" (Iyov 28:28).

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RAMCHAL — MESILAS YESHARIM (CHAPTER 4)

One can channel the human drive for kavod toward positive spiritual ends. Just as a person feels pain when a contemporary achieves worldly honor that he was denied, how much more so will a person be pained in eternity if those who were equal to him in this world achieve glorious, eternal honor in the World of Truth because they exerted themselves in Torah and good deeds while he remained complacent.

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ "Would you believe that I envy you?" Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev asked the violent sinner who stood before him. "What is there in me that you could envy?" returned the other. "Why," said the tzaddik, "our Sages have taught that if a person repents out of a love of God, his intentional transgressions are counted as meritorious deeds. Now make a simple calculation. If a man with as many sins on his account as you have decides to repent wholeheartedly, and all the sins are converted into meritorious deeds — how many mitzvos will you have! Far, far more than I've got, that's for sure!" With this the tzaddik grasped him by his lapels and implored him so earnestly to repent that he made a firm decision to turn to the path of teshuvah.

A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals, by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, p. 71

13. To Mourn the Passing of a Close Relative (Aveilus)

(Torah Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Hamitzvos Positive 59 Sefer Chareidim 16-57

SEFER CHAREIDIM

As the Torah explicitly commands regarding a kohen: "Except for his close relative who is near to him — for his mother, for his father, for his son, for his daughter, and for his brother; and for his virgin sister... for her he shall become ritually impure" (Vayikra 21:2–3).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

▪ Do all seven days of mourning have the same stringency?

SEFER HAMITZVOS HAKATZAR

Although an ordinary priest (kohen hedyot) is strictly forbidden to come into contact with a corpse or become ritually impure (tamei) for deceased persons in general, he is commanded as a sacred obligation to contract ritual impurity for his seven immediate relatives in attending to their burial. He is likewise obligated to defile himself for his legally wedded wife. Regarding a brother or an unmarried sister, this obligation applies specifically to those who share the same father (paternal siblings). Female relatives of the priestly line are not prohibited from contracting corpse impurity for their dead, yet they are fully obligated in the laws of mourning (aveilus).

Subsumed within this commandment is the universal mitzvah of mourning (aveilus), which obligates every individual in Klal Yisroel to observe mourning for each of these seven immediate relatives.

The obligation to observe mourning on the first day — the day of death and burial — stems from biblical law (mid'Oraisa), whereas the remaining six days of the seven-day mourning period (shivah) are mandated by rabbinic enactment (mid'Rabbanan).

This mitzvah applies in all places, at all times, for both men and women.

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Subsumed within this biblical precept is the mitzvah of mourning (aveilus), which applies equally to Kohanim and non-Kohanim, and to men and women alike. Only the first day of mourning — the day of death and burial — is mandated by biblical law (mid'Oraisa), whereas the remaining six days of shivah are required by rabbinic enactment (mid'Rabbanan). The formal mitzvah of mourning commences only after burial has taken place; this is the reason King David first washed and anointed himself after his infant passed away, for prior to interment, mourning practices do not yet take effect.

HOW THIS MITZVAH PERFECTS OUR CHARACTER, AND HELPS US TO RESEMBLE AND SO COME CLOSE TO HASHEM:

The period of mourning is supposed to be a period of reflection; A reflection about the life and accomplishments of the deceased, as well as a time to reflect about one's own mortality. When one experiences the pain of the death of someone close, it makes one introspect about how to live his own life. Mourning the deceased makes us realize that our time on Earth is limited and it can inspire us to become better, and continue to perfect ourselves through Torah and Mitzvos.

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS AND IDEAS BEHIND THE MITZVAH:

RADVAZ

The shiva is designed to create an atmosphere where one will be stirred to think deeply about life and death. He should ask himself, What has he accomplished in life, what is the direction of his life. These questions should lead him to reflection and repentance.

SFAS EMES

• The Sfas Emes gives one of his most concrete statements about bereavement while discussing the korban shelamim: “One who is whole in spirit brings a peace-offering (shelamim), and not an acute mourner (onein).” A person who is complete and whole (shalem) brings a korban shelamim; an onen does not. The play on the words peace-offering (shelamim) and complete and whole (shalem) is significant. A korban shelamim expresses wholeness, peace, and integration. The onen stands in a condition where that wholeness has been broken. Torah does not require a person to demonstrate faith by pretending that nothing painful happened. The spiritual deficiency (chisaron) itself is part of the truth (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Tzav 5659).

• The Sfas Emes gives his clearest discussion of this idea in the context of mourning for the Beis HaMikdash. He explains that some spiritual work occurs through shira and some through bechiyah. At times the hidden sparks can be raised through song; at other times the path upward is through tears. Personal mourning can therefore be understood as a period in which the relationship passes through a different mode. During life there was presence, conversation, and action. After death, the immediate experience is absence. Through honest tears and heartfelt longing, the mourner elevates the pain of absence itself into a deeper spiritual bond (Sfas Emes, Devarim, Devarim 5647).

• One of the most beautiful foundations for understanding death appears in Chayei Sarah. The Sfas Emes writes: “and each individual draws down the specific spiritual vitality that belongs to his soul.” Every individual draws into the world the particular chiyus that belongs to him. No human life is simply interchangeable with another.

Every person receives a particular place, personality, relationships, tests, gifts, and mission. Through his or her life, a particular form of Divine chiyus enters the world. The Sfas Emes develops the idea especially in relation to tzaddikim: the spiritual illumination drawn into the world by tzaddikim remains. At first the mourner experiences almost entirely what is gone. With time, he may begin to recognize what remains (Sfas Emes, Bereishis, Chayei Sarah 5651).

• Few moments in the Torah are more painful than the death of Nadav and Avihu. The Mishkan has just been inaugurated. The Shechinah has appeared. Then, in the middle of that exalted moment, two sons of Aharon die. The Sfas Emes insists that silent acceptance (dumiyah) here means much more than remaining physically silent: "And Aharon was silent" does not mean only silencing his voice, but that he completely nullified his own will before Hashem. In bereavement, "And Aharon was silent" (va-yidom Aharon) becomes the model of accepting that a human being cannot force Hashem's governance (hanhagas Hashem) into the limits of his own mind (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5641).

• Immediately after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Moshe tells Aharon and his remaining sons: "Your brethren, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which Hashem has kindled" (Vayikra 10:6). The Sfas Emes explains: They were punished "for us"; therefore we must cry over them. This is a very specific teaching about Nadav and Avihu. The Sfas Emes regards them as extraordinary tzaddikim and connects their deaths to the spiritual condition of Klal Yisrael. Their loss therefore becomes a summons to communal introspection. This should never be turned into a general claim that ordinary relatives are responsible for the death of someone they loved. This dimension of aveilus therefore moves the mourner from passive pain toward responsibility. The deceased's departure reminds the living that their own sacred mission (shelichus) continues (Sfas Emes, Vayikra, Shemini 5640).

RELATED HASHKAFAH / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

▪ Discuss the importance of remembering that we are mortal, and remembering that one day we will die.

▪ Discuss how that motivates us to accomplish because we realize that we have a limited number of days.

MORAL DILEMMAS:

During mourning (aveilus), the principle of miktzas hayom k'kulo dictates that on the final day of shiva, mourning restrictions terminate shortly after morning prayers. A non-observant mourner whose seventh day coincided with Shabbos asked his rabbi whether he could terminate his mourning on Shabbos morning under miktzas hayom and travel to his business. To prevent the mourner from violating Shabbos by driving to work, the rabbi told him: 'We do not apply miktzas hayom on Shabbos.' Did the rabbi act permissibly by giving this halachic instruction to protect the man from Shabbos desecration?

Answer: He was allowed to say that.

— Source: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Veharev Na Volume One, p. 46

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES:

❖ The following story was told by Rav Paysach Krohn: I'd like to share a touching story about Rav Matisyahu Solomon, highlighting his concern for others. In 1997, Rav Matisyahu arrived in Lakewood to serve as the mashgiach, having relocated from Gateshead. He settled on 6th Street, next to Rav Shimon Epstein and his family. Rav Shimon was a respected figure in

Lakewood, and both he and Rav Matisyahu had large families, including daughters of the same age. A year after Rav Matisyahu's move, Rav Matisyahu's daughter became engaged, much to the delight of her close friend, the Epstein girl, who eagerly anticipated dancing at the wedding. However, tragedy struck two weeks before the wedding when Rav Shimon Epstein passed away, plunging his family into mourning (Aveilus). In their Aveilus, they could not attend or participate in the Solomon's wedding festivities. On the wedding day, the Epsteins returned home from work to find a heartfelt note from their neighbors, the Solomons. In the note, the Solomons expressed sorrow for their absence at the wedding. The Solomons insisted the Epsteins not worry about dinner, as a meal from the wedding - including dishes from the smorgasbord, main course, and dessert - would soon be delivered to them. True to their word, the caterer from the wedding sent the exact meal being served at the celebration, allowing the Epsteins to partake in the joy from their home. Furthermore, Rav Matisyahu arranged for the photographer at the wedding to quickly develop photos of the Bedeken and Chuppah and have them delivered to the Epstein family. As they dined, they were able to view these images, symbolically sharing in the celebrations. That's greatness! Thinking about the other person.

Table Talk, Edition 371 (Parshas Vaera), by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

A. NOT TO WORK DURING THE MOURNING PERIOD

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 49-4

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALMUD ABOUT THIS MITZVAH:

- Can one go to work if he is very poor?
- Are all days of shiva equally strict?

SEFER CHAREIDIM

Throughout the first three days of mourning, a mourner is strictly forbidden to perform any creative work, even if he is an impoverished pauper who subsists on communal charity. From the third day onward, if he is genuinely destitute and lacks sustenance, he may perform labor discreetly within the privacy of his home. In this respect, the laws of mourning are more stringent than the laws of Chol HaMoed: even in cases of irreversible financial loss (davar ha'aveid), a mourner is forbidden to perform work personally and may only have it executed through others.

B. NOT TO WEAR TEFILLIN THE FIRST DAY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 49-3

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A mourner is strictly forbidden to don tefillin on the first day of mourning, because tefillin are designated by Scripture as "splendor" (pe'er), which is incompatible with the bitter grief of the first day.

C. NOT TO EAT ONE'S OWN FOOD ON THE FIRST DAY

(Rabbinically Mandated Mitzvah), Sefer Chareidim 48-16

SEFER CHAREIDIM

A mourner is forbidden to eat his first meal following the burial from his own food; rather, neighbors and relatives must provide him with the meal of consolation (se'udas havra'ah). According to several authorities, this restriction applies to all meals consumed throughout the entire first day.